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# THE ISLE OF STRIFE

BY

GEORGE C. SHEDD

AUTHOR OF "THE PRINCESS OF FORGE," "THE INCORRIGIBLE  
DUKANE," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED



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# THE ISLE OF STRIFE

## CHAPTER I

### OLD WINE IN A NEW BOTTLE

Lieutenant William Harrington and I, making our way towards the Dominion Line pier from which we were to take boat from Galveston to New York, were discussing future plans.

"I'm in doubt what I really desire, society or solitude," Billy remarked reflectively.

"As for society, you've had nothing else at the post," I answered. "What you want is the other thing. There's no way out of it, you must come with me up the Maine coast."

"So be it, then, driver of wild oxen! But I must first spend two or three days in Washington, you know, before my leave begins."

Six months previous I had by chance made the acquaintance of Harrington, a young officer of the Eighteenth Cavalry, at San Antonio where he was stationed. Instantly we became friends, something in our natures making for reciprocal liking. As good fortune would have it, his leave came due at the time when I was starting for New York,

and we joined company to make the trip together. Here we were, then, in Galveston: our heels clicked briskly on the uneven pavements as we advanced along the streets, exuberant in new freedom and our tongues steadily wagging. The fog which lay over the city was beginning to break beneath the hot July sun. Now for a moment it would drop like a veil to wrap buildings and bear to our nostrils the salty smell of the sea; now it was stripped away, leaving but narrow streaks and tatters to swim between walls. At last we came out upon the wharves and made our way among endless rows of barrels, bales, sacks, and crates.

"I suppose it will be rather quiet up there where you'll take me," Billy vouchsafed.

"Not a thing to do but fish and loaf. It's idyllic."

"I will grow fat," said he; for be it known that Billy was as thin as a pennon-staff. "Don't you think that that will be a good place to lay on a little flesh?"

"Admirable. It's an isle for dreamers, lotus-eaters, and flesh-accumulators."

"Not lovers, I hope," Billy sniffed. "I'm sick of girls. Promise me there'll be no girls."

"I promise faithfully," said I.

"Then you have my word to join you — and here's the boat. Up you go."

Half an hour after the steamer had swung away from its pier and pointed southeastward on its



course across the Gulf we were seated on deck, skimming a bundle of newspapers.

"Hello!" Billy exclaimed after a time. "They've caught another one."

"Another what?" I inquired.

"Why, a spy. Strange thing how there seems always to be a steady business in that line on the Continent. This fellow was a Russian, it appears — an officer, too, pretty well up, who sold Germany plans of a battleship, or a fortress, or something which is n't specified. Want of money makes a lot of fellows over yonder go crooked and sell their country — debts, or race-horses, or actresses. Thank Heaven, we don't have traitors in our army, who'll sell the United States for a handful of gold. Wonder what this Russian fellow disposed of — and what particular kind of frozen Hades they'll send him to."

I mused a moment, for the newspaper item had awakened a train of thought in my mind.

"Curious, now, I'd forgotten all about my map," I said.

"Humph — map." Billy was but half attentive, eyes still on the newspaper he held.

"A map, exactly. I happen to be the possessor of a secret map of a German fortification."

"Back to thine oxen, dreamer," he scoffed.

"And thou to thine asses, doubter," I retorted. "This is a straight tale."

"Somehow I can't see the connection between

peace and order were restored to the mines, while Douglass himself was dead. A bullet had closed his adventurous and disloyal career. And a fitting close! It is no wonder then that we who remained breathed easier in the new security brought by his death. Most of all were we happy at that time because Maitland had come through the struggle with honor untarnished and was soon to call Ethys his wife. "Have I not reason to be happy?" said he. "And we are done with trouble."

Who can look into the future? If there be such a thing as premonition, surely as we stood over Douglass' open trunk while Maitland uttered those words it should have foreshadowed in warning what was to happen. The moment was auspicious. Maitland lightly balanced in his hands the dead man's sword, an English officer's sword, while I perused the map of some fortification which Douglass had drawn and left unnamed. We should keep these, we had resolved, as mementoes of the struggle which we had fought and won. I rolled up the map, saying, "It's good draughtsmanship — and the fellow over and over, rascally, avaricious, accurate." For Douglass had been just the one for such an act! To creep somehow into a nation's fortress in order afterwards to sell its secrets for a price, that deed fitted his very nature. Danger he loved — and loved money. What I, as well as Maitland, had forgotten was that there yet breathed somewhere on the globe a plump, suave, patient gentleman,

D'Urville, who had been hand in glove with the dead Scotchman and a sharer of his secrets. Well, if we never forgot anything, how full our heads would be!

That D'Urville had escaped from America altogether I soon afterwards learned by the evidence of my own eyes. Six months later in New York when I was engrossed with a matter of vast importance to me, being nothing less than the state of my heart and that of Elizabeth Moore's, and how to bring the two into mutually reciprocal and cohesive conjunction forever, I had a fleeting encounter with the little rotund Frenchman. Mr. Moore was sailing to Venezuela to engage with the government of that country, in behalf of our own, in certain weighty and extended negotiations; and with him went Elizabeth. I was on deck with her and at the last moment flung doubt to the winds and laid my heart and life, so to speak, in her two hands.

"I will reflect upon the matter," she answered.

"'Reflect!'" I exclaimed indignantly at the brutal word. "It's plain to see you're a diplomat's daughter."

"We must both reflect upon it," said she, bending her brows in thought. "Now hurry, Charlie, the boat is about to cast off."

So it was. I hastened to the gang-plank and there collided with that villain D'Urville, who was at the last minute and with the least ostentation possible climbing aboard. Recollection of the brief



exchange of repartee that thereupon passed between us is unpleasant to remember; the honors were all on his side. As I discovered after rushing uptown to inform Maitland of the news, criminals are not extraditable from Venezuela; they are in majority down there, he stated, and run the government. And so the man had got clean off.

Thought of the Frenchman was presently driven from my mind by a letter received from Elizabeth in which she returned the heart I offered.

"I am fond of you, Charlie," she wrote, "for you have been exceedingly good to me, always. But since you have asked me for an answer it would only be cruel to delay giving it. So I will say immediately and definitely that I cannot marry you. Once you thought yourself madly in love with Ethys, now with me; to-morrow it will be another. Charlie, you are only a boy, a big boy and a nice boy, but still a boy, with too much money and nothing to do. You could make a mark in the world if you would cease to be frivolous and take yourself seriously. Yes, Charlie, I like you — like your black hair, your dark eyes, your square shoulders, and many, many other things about you. But a woman does not fall in love with just these, no indeed! It is a man she wants, a confident, masterful man to love, to mate, to adore. He must be straight, honest, courageous, tried and proven, admired by women, respected by men, one who will flinch at nothing and dare anything for the woman he loves. Oh, Charlie, I have opened my heart to you, knowing that you will respect my confidence — and I almost weep to tell you I cannot marry you. . . ."

I read no more; I crushed the letter in my hand, my heart bitter with disappointment, shame, rage — rage at myself. It was true, all that she had written. A boy, a big boy! That expressed what every one thought of me. Jack Maitland had spoken it more than once — “a big long-legged boy”; Ethys had said it — “a nice, pleasant, obliging boy, but too rich”; and my father, dead now a year, had looked at me curiously from his sick-bed and sighed. Now I knew his thought. What if I was twenty-six! What if I stood topping six feet, could lift eight hundred pounds, row a shell, or run a fast mile! What if I belonged to clubs, had motor cars, racing boats, money!

\* One week later I sat in a saddle on a ranch in Texas which I had inherited along with other things from my father. I would see about this “boy”! No one except the manager knew who I was, and he, under penalty of dismissal, kept inviolate my secret. I flung myself into the work of the ranch with a sort of fierceness, for I was bitter, bitter at the world, bitter at myself. Had I not loved her? God knows I had! It had been and still was (my heart spoke true enough this time) the one serious passion of my life. Ah, that letter which took away from me hope of happiness. I went about my work silently and with the earnestness born of a desire to forget; rain or shine, summer grass or winter snow, under sun or stars, in sand or alkali or flowers, I rode with the best of those hard-riding cow-

punchers, or, if need be, fought the worst with my fists. The hard open life of the range, the free air of the limitless prairies, hardened my frame and deepened my nature. I was with men, earning my wage as a man, rated a man. Thus passed eighteen months. At the end of that time companions who had sweated under the sun by my side in the heat of the round-up and cutting-out, or branding, or tamed unridden horses with me, or felt the weight of my hand in fair fight, did not call me "boy."

But this was not what I wished, this respect, or rather was not all I wanted. Measure of ranch life I had taken, yet remained unsatisfied; therefore I departed, asking myself what I must have still, but receiving no answer unless it was in the picture of Elizabeth's fair face conjured up by memory.

As for the map, D'Urville, and all the rest of the Forge adventure, I had gradually forgotten him in my nearer, more vital affair. The map was safe at home in some drawer where I had tossed it; it was unnamed and its very existence was unknown to but three men — Maitland, myself, and now Harrington. After all, what adventure could arise from it?

Passengers were few upon the steamer. A voyage across the Gulf of Mexico under a broiling July sun is not lightly to be undertaken. Of the few however Harrington and I drew together with two gentlemen who proved to be congenial and with whom we fell into that easy and amiable acquaint-

## OLD WINE IN A NEW BOTTLE 11

anceship which is bred of experience and travel. That afternoon the four of us sat on deck under an awning on the shady side of the boat in an endeavor to get some comfort from the breeze created by the boat, though this was little. The sun shone down out of a cloudless sky upon the water in a glare that made the eyes ache; rope, rod, and rail burned to the touch; the deck reflected the sun's rays; the staterooms were stifling. Far out across the water there flashed into sight from time to time a school of flying fish; overhead the wireless sputtered at intervals, seeming only to intensify the heat by its crackling chatter.

"And so his luck, his famous Lonagan luck, held good once more." It was Brumley, the war correspondent, concluding a story of a notorious gun-runner which he had been narrating. "That was last year; I've not seen or heard of him since. In all probability, he's down yonder somewhere this present minute running contraband stuff to revolutionists." And he jerked his thumb southward.

"Then he's earning his money this weather," said Billy, mopping his face.

The fourth of our number, a huge Mexican, a prosperous coffee raiser and shipper, heaved himself up in his cane chair and removed the black cigar from his lips. His eyes moved restlessly from one to another of us as he stroked his great white moustache.

"No, gentlemen, Lonagan will run no more

guns," said he. "What you call his famous luck — pouf! — has been blown away in powder-smoke."

"Ah, they finished him at last?"

"A month ago — Castro."

"You're sure of it?"

"As sure as that" — he snapped his fingers with a resounding crack — "for I observed all. *El Presidente* finally tricked him, sent Del Hervalle to pretend he was an *insurrecto*, to bargain and to plan a landing of weapons, and for once Lonagan moved hastily. Del Hervalle urged haste and paid high. So, gentlemen, they took him. Then Castro — but all the world knows Castro. Six months ago it occurred, and I chanced to be in Caracas, where I am not yet known. Being a Mexican, I learned many things which would have been impossible for an American to acquire — you understand, gentlemen — and could do many things unquestioned which you could not have done. But neither was it known that I have offices and live much of the time in New York, or perhaps Castro might of me also have asked questions. Lonagan was shot one morning against the cathedral wall. *El Presidente* himself was there to observe the *dénouement*, for Lonagan had caused him considerable anxiety at one time and another and the good dictator wished to see with his own eyes that the man was dead. I also found occasion to be present. Alas, I could render no assistance, none, and could only stand with my hands in my pockets and smoke a cigar and think that it

would be well if Castro too were placed with his back to the wall. Lonagan I had met in my office once, perhaps twice or three times, on important matters of business — I may say that much now he is dead. What matter to me where coffee grows? I have plantations in Mexico, Honduras, Costa Rica, Brazil; and politics sometimes may even disturb coffee. Undoubtedly — and so Lonagan was shot at last. With a lump of tobacco in his cheek, such as he always ate, he went to the wall. It was sad — a brave man, and always the tobacco. He perceived me. He winked an eye slowly thus, as if it were a jest. When the affair was concluded, I returned to the hotel, where a peon handed me a scrap of letter — observe.” From his breast-pocket the narrator drew a bill-book and extracted a dirty leaf of paper. “It is in Lonagan’s handwriting. I will read, ‘It was Hervalles who double-crossed me. — P. L.’ Thus a brave man died.”

He sank back in his chair, still holding the paper in his fingers and gazing reflectively out across the sea. We had had a peep at an obscure tragedy, at one of the swift and merciless moves in the endless game being played beneath the placid surface of world affairs.

“Del Hervalles — don’t think I know him,” Brumley remarked, twisting the point of his vandyke beard. “But men bob up awhile and then rapidly out of sight again down there; besides, I’ve been in China the past year.”

The Mexican replaced Lonagan's letter and put away his wallet. "Nothing is known of this Del Hervalle, unless Castro knows it," he said, "for since this successful coup he is high in *El Presidente's* favor. Of all gun-runners, Castro feared and hated Lonagan most — it was a bull's-eye, that which Del Hervalle made; and then there were other matters in which he had been previously skillful. While still in Venezuela I made a point to observe him on several occasions, though to look at him from a distance only, for I myself did not care to become known. I may have matters of negotiation, concessions to arrange — ah, *caramba*, what taxes these *presidentes* can imagine and invent! This Del Hervalle has honor conferred upon him" — the Mexican's eyes flashed scornfully for an instant — "for he is become Castro's right hand in government. He even now confers with Señor Moore on matters pending between Venezuela and the United States. Perceive, a wonder! For Castro shows gratitude!"

My ears pricked up at the name he mentioned — Elizabeth's father, no other. Painful recollections swiftly mounted to my mind, but painful as they were I was still more eager for information. So I proceeded to question him, prefacing my inquiries with a statement that I knew both Mr. Moore and his daughter.

"It was my good fortune to meet them just before leaving Venezuela," he stated. "Miss Moore,

how charming! And her beauty — all Caracas is at her feet." With an expressive gesture he indicated the worshiping state of that country's capital.

"And did Mr. Moore expect to return to the States?"

"Mr. Moore mentioned such a possibility for this summer. But that, my young friend, was six months ago. Have you also lost your heart to the beautiful daughter?"

"Who would not when one has seen her?" I said as gayly as possible.

Did they return, I should see Elizabeth! Then my spirits sank. She was no longer anything to me. Since my dismissal, I had no doubt faded utterly from her mind or, if remembered, it was only to be numbered among a score of suitors who had striven to win her favor. When I came out of my meditation I found the conversation had drifted to reminiscence of Lonagan's hazardous career. Brumley recalled how he had met him in Mobile, where he was temporarily associated in a venture with a reckless handsome chap.

"It was their first voyage together, it appeared."

"You say this other chap had a scar on his cheek?" I asked.

"From eye to mouth."

"And named Douglass?" Then I turned to Billy. "This was no other than Frederic Douglass, the fellow who was at Forge."



"So you knew him?" Brumley inquired.

"Undoubtedly. A slender, fair-haired Scotchman, scarred, as you state on the cheek, lithe and active, polite or arrogant as suited his purpose, cool and not afraid of the devil himself."

"That's the chap, name, manner, and body."

Then I proceeded to relate the circumstances of my acquaintance with the man.

The wealthy New York family of Fenton owned a mining district in the Rockies, a camp called Forge. The manager had filled the vacancy of assistant with this fellow Frederic Douglass, whom he had met somewhere or other casually. That Douglass was a proficient engineer enough there could be no question. In time gold was missed and the manager was discharged, to be replaced by another engineer, a rising young chap, Jack Maitland, who had been a university classmate of Tom Fenton. But the gold continued to shrink. It was at this time that Mr. Fenton, Sr., his niece, Ethys, Mr. and Mrs. Arlington, and I went to Forge from New York for an outing. It promised to be a comfortable one, as Forge House was a big stone mansion overlooking town and camp and was used as a residence by the manager and his assistant. Douglass, it turned out, had brought with him a Frenchman, D'Urville by name, to fill the position of mechanic. These two, we later discovered, were old comrades in many a dark piece of work and were now bent on laying hands on as much gold as possible and making off

with it. But the coming of Ethys Fenton brought a new element into the game.

Both Maitland and Douglass fell in love with her. The Scotch adventurer was just the man to interest though not attract a girl of her temperament, and it was not then known that he was a disgraced officer of the British army, nor that he had engaged in dishonorable businesses all over the world — in China, on the Gold Coast, in South America, and elsewhere. On the other hand, Maitland was an honest, skillful, and brilliant man in his profession. Any one who had seen Ethys Fenton knew her loveliness and amiability of character, a girl simple, witty, and unspoiled, notwithstanding that she was wealthy in her own right. The clever and unscrupulous Scot immediately set out to win her hand, destroy Maitland's honor and good name, and thus rid himself of a rival. The camp he stirred to mutiny and disruption; he put in operation a scheme whereby a number of miscreants attempted to seize the gold, but failed; and finally perceiving that discovery of his schemes threatened him and his companion, D'Urville, they did not halt at murder in order to extricate themselves. These plots nearly cost Maitland his life. But in the end the Scot's web of intrigue broke down, he himself being thoroughly entangled in it, and while attempting to escape, he was shot by Maitland. D'Urville alone we could not lay hands on — D'Urville, that placid, ingenious, plump little man. He escaped.

## CHAPTER II

### A GENTLEMAN OF A SINGLE IDEA

The island of Lavouche lies snug against the upper Maine coast, and the currents which wash its sides have not long ceased to be Canadian waters. A mile in length, it has but a third of that width; a virgin though not particularly dense growth of wood covers it, chiefly pine and hemlock; and the northern half being high though level presents a sheer and abrupt face to the sea, while the southern part possesses a smooth and pleasant character. Whether in the strict sense of the word it is an isle, we shall leave to geographers to determine; it stretches north and south parallel with the coast, sheltered by a point of rock which some little distance above thrusts itself out from the mainland, for all the world like a brown thumb. At flood tide the island is separated from the main beach by a hundred yards of swift swirling current, but at ebb one may cross where he will on the sands. If custom of speech give any authority, then island it is, for the native fishermen have so pronounced it for two hundred years, in fact ever since that time when the little band of Acadians, driven from their northern home and wandering in search of another more

.

secure, first pushed keel upon its sands. What is Lavouche but the corruption, in their patois, of *Île de la Bouche*! To this day you can hear gray-heads reciting old tales give it the full and ancient appellation. Therefore *The Mouth* it is, which finds a peculiar significance in the formation of the coast.

The village of Lavouche sits about the middle of the west side of the island on a low floor of rock. Behind it rises the cliff some fifty feet in height, though this descends in an abrupt declivity to the south of the hamlet, permitting a road into the wood. The houses are old, constructed by the first comers two centuries previous, and built in the style which prevailed at that period in France, — of stone, the upper story paneled with oak beams, steep and hip-roofed, one against another, thus making the sides of each dwelling to brace its neighbors and their fronts to form two unbroken walls between which runs the narrow street. At the end of this spreads the open beach, where when the tide is in the fishermen can draw their boats high and safe, when the tide is out the wives can cross afoot to the west. The narrow channel between the island village and the mainland is, with that quaint but vivid figurativeness of the French, named *The Throat*, as the long protecting jet of rock which shelters the isle was called *Le Dent* — *The Tooth*.

To this spot, years before, my father and his close friend, Alexander Moore, then young men, cruising

the coast on a holiday, had put in to escape a brewing storm. Little known to-day, the place was at that time undiscovered. The charm of the island, the primitive and picturesque life of the village, the simple hospitality of the fishermen captivated the pair; and each summer thereafter they made it the objective point of their outing. Later each bought a parcel of the island and built him a house. That of Alexander Moore was ambitious. But as my mother had died, leaving only my father and me, a young boy, my parent contented himself with erecting a comfortable one-story lodge. Life here at Lavouche was suited to my taste. I ran with the village urchins, swam, sailed, and dug in the sands for mussels; and by the time I was fifteen, when I had my last summer there before going away to school for good, I could handle a boat like the fishermen and speak their patois as fluently as they themselves.

Now, after so long an interval, I was going back to see into what fine brown fellows had grown Jean and Gaspard and Antoine and all the other youngsters whom I had counted brothers.

On the pier in New York our steamer party dissolved; the coffee merchant rolling away in a taxicab to his offices, the journalist seeking his editorial chief, and Harrington making for the ferry. With a hearty handshake he had promised to join me at Lavouche as soon as he dispatched his business — a week at the outside. Being midsummer, New York

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was naturally empty of people I knew, scattered where they might escape its heat. So I planned to set out for the north late that afternoon, where Andrew, my family servant, had already departed upon receipt of a wireless message sent by me two days previous. He would shake up Stag Lodge and put it in order against my coming. It was just at lunch time when by a good turn of fortune I ran across Jack Maitland, who had come into town on business.

"And you never sent word you were on the way," he reproached, as we sat down to table. "I say, Woodworth, that's shabby treatment."

"I did n't know but what you were off on a cruise."

"That won't do. A wire to the office would have been forwarded. By Heaven, you've acquired a fine color! You could sell yourself for a leather antique. Thinner, too! That life in the saddle takes the fat off a fellow like a Turkish bath. Well, there's nothing for it now but to come along with me to Newport. Ethys will be delighted to see you. Then there's the youngster, whom you have n't yet beheld, — one year old last week."

I interrupted him. "See here, I've all my plans made to go north at five this afternoon and have wired Andrew to expect me to-morrow."

"The deuce! I want you to come, for a month or a year, as you wish."

"That's kind, Jack. Extend the invitation later

and I'll snap it up. Now it's impossible. I've arranged for a friend to join me up there."

"Well, you must come later."

"That I will."

"Ethys will be disappointed when she learns you're here and did not join us."

"Tell her that I shall come presently and hold the baby."

Our conversation drifted to general topics. I described my life on the ranch to Jack, with whom I had kept up a more or less desultory correspondence, while he in turn touched lightly on his business successes. Then talk veered to old times at Forge.

"What do you think," said I, "our friend D'Urville is prospering?"

"The devil he is!" Jack sat up. "Has that rogue bobbed to the surface once more?"

"Unquestionably. At present he's a friend of President Castro, and if not his right hand, at least one of his fingers. Of late he has been conducting for Venezuela certain negotiations in which Mr. Alexander Moore is the American representative and on which account he has spent the last year and a half in that country."

For a moment Jack drummed the cloth in silence. "Well, that's a rapid rise," he remarked.

"But then anything may happen in these pseudo-republics," I replied. "He would be just the man to grasp opportunities, just the man to make himself indispensable to a president like Castro, for he

would stop at nothing criminal — and meanwhile feather his nest.”

“Trust him for that.”

“But to think of him meeting Mr. Moore, and perhaps Elizabeth, as a social equal!”

“Hard to swallow, is n’t it, Charlie?”

“Knowing what we do of the scamp,” I added.

“I can’t forget that he’s a murderer — but Castro’s no better. Well, when I see Mr. Moore I’ll ask him about the fellow.”

“Mr. Moore will be returning soon, I suppose.”

“He has already returned, he and Betty. They spent a day with us, and Betty was as lovely as ever. Were n’t you rather hit there once, Charlie?”

“Hard — and still am,” I acknowledged.

“Get busy, then,” Maitland advised in a brisk tone.

“Busy!” I exclaimed. “What do you think I’m doing, buying a motor car?”

Jack laid down his fork and laughed. “If you’re really in love, you should n’t lose any time. I did n’t in my case, you’ll perhaps recollect. Time is precious, time is golden, time is — eh — ” He trailed off into ineptitude. “That’s it, get busy and win out. She’s worth it.”

“Don’t I know that?” I asked bitterly.

“See here, Charlie, I’m your friend. Come, what’s the trouble? Perhaps I can advise you — or Ethys can.”

“All trouble. A year and a half ago I asked



her to marry me and she declined. And what do you think was her reason? Said I was a boy."

Jack smiled broadly, but when I glared at him he immediately grew serious.

"Well, you're a man now," he said.

"That is as may be."

"So you'll go in and win her."

"She stated that her answer was final. No chance."

"Oh, come, don't look on the dark side."

"Her decision is irrevocable," I answered.

"That's why I went to Texas."

"So that's the explanation, eh? Ethys and I wondered what was the cause of your sudden exile."

"Where are they now, she and her father?"

"Blessed if I can remember," Jack answered.

"Off somewhere. Mr. Moore wanted quiet to finish certain diplomatic matters and Betty went along. Ethys could give you the name of the spot."

"It's immaterial. If you chance across him, ask about D'Urville."

"Ah, I'll not forget to do that."

"But you must inquire concerning a Señor Del Hervalle; that's the title he uses now."

"Oh, so."

We rose from the table and walked together to the door, where we prepared to separate. As Jack was turning away, he swung about and caught me by the lapel of my coat.

"What's the name of the place where you're going?" he demanded.

"Lavouche."

He stood reflecting. "It seems to me that Mr. Moore remarked something about going to a spot where he and your father used to summer."

"Lavouche, that's the place."

"Well, if I'm not mistaken, you'll find it's where he and Betty are."

"No!" I exclaimed in dismay.

"Yes," retorted he with a grin. "And just the nook, too, to pick up the broken thread of your tender romance. A lonely island in the sea, sighing boughs, sparkling waves, throbbing hearts —"

Dumfounded as I was by the intelligence he had given me, I yet had sufficient presence of mind to halt this stream of mock sentiment. "That's enough for this time," I said, and broke away.

He waved a hand after me and called, "Be industrious, throw on the high speed, come in a winner."

From any one but Maitland I would not have tolerated such jesting, but the past had closely knit our friendship and I knew that under his veil of airy badinage he held for me a fine and loyal sympathy. Nor had I any embarrassment to fear; he was the soul of discretion. But into this matter he could not see: never at any time had Elizabeth shown for me, now that I looked back, any special affection; always generous, always kind as she was, her feel-

ing had not gone deeper than friendship. I had failed to awaken a response in her heart, that was all.

With this uncheerful consideration engaging my mind I proceeded to my agent's office, secured the key of my closed home, and thither bent my steps. For, true to my intention, I was going to make an examination of the map which I had acquired from the dead Scot of Forge. I opened desks and rummaged drawers and ransacked files; I could not lay hand on it. Where I had tossed it two years before upon returning from the West I was now unable to recall. It was only when the margin of time left for me to catch my train was growing slender that I finally discovered it in a chest, together with a heap of miscellaneous treasures of youthful days. Thereupon thrusting it into my bag, I rushed away to catch a cab for the station.

An hour later I sat in my section of a Pullman speeding northward from New York. On my lap lay outspread the map which had fallen into my hands so strangely and which now after two years was beginning in my mind to assume shape and substance as a document of highest import. It was in size a sheet perhaps two feet by three of the azure tracing paper customarily employed by draughtsmen for making blue-prints and was as fresh as the day when first I laid eyes upon it. Every dot, every stroke was clear and fine and perfect — a beautiful piece of work, executed with the exactness and delicacy of a copper plate. A

technical drawing, a dry skeleton of a plan, yet what hidden preparation of engineers and statesmen it disclosed, what secret labors of an army, what silent and sinister defense of a nation! It was a leaf stolen from the locked military book of an empire. Sharp, conscienceless Douglass! Whether he had accomplished that astounding thing, that unbelievable miracle of making his way into a fortress' recesses and there obtaining its bounds and measurements, or whether by some rascality he had got possession of an original plan and made a copy, I could imagine him as he bent over his table marking off points with rule and compass, dipping pen in ink, drawing with skillful unhurried hand, and meantime calculating in his crafty brain where his product would find its best price. There were always markets for such wares. Yes, sharp Douglass, it was a business he delighted in; he would have stolen his own boots and sold them if he thought to take profit from the deed; his fingers were always itching for secrets, intrigues, and unlawful contrivances. Once finished, the sheet would bring him a fat bag of gold. England would have bargained with him, France would have beamed on him, Russia would have opened her heavy purse. Moreover, here upon the margin, bringing it to intelligible completion, he had annotated the work with a memorandum in German script. I could imagine his sardonic smile, for it was just the sort of humor to amuse his diabolical soul, this filching, at the conclusion, of the

nation's very tongue. I gazed at the sheet. What fortress did it outline? What stronghold did it betray? One, no doubt, of that mighty cordon which girt the Empire with stone and steel and bristling guns.

Something of the grave character of the chart began to impress me. Here was I, a young fellow, an ordinary American, one without interest in the German Empire; indeed, one who had never given two thoughts to her affairs, come by a singular chain of circumstances into possession of this document. Now, verily, it seemed to grow ominous in my hands. Hitherto I had given it little consideration, flung it into an old chest with other idle rubbish; but as I gazed upon it I perceived that it was one of those things that, wherever it might be, whoever had it, could never prove insignificant and never idle. The nation concerned was too powerful and the issue at stake too mighty, and once it became known that this sheet was in existence, no obstacle would halt Germany on the one hand or her enemies on the other in an effort to seize it. In truth it was fraught with future complications, electric with possibilities. I could destroy it—but against that my mind cried out. The mystery, the spicy odor of things unknown and momentous that clung to it, the beck it made, the suggestion to fling aside fear and challenge fate, fascinated me as a red flag charms and holds immovable the startled deer. No, I could not destroy

it. And as if fate, now that my decision was made, would at once put me to the touch, a harsh voice spoke at my shoulder:

"Where did you get that!"

I whirled about in my seat, unconsciously clutching the map in a defensive grip.

There in the aisle and a step behind my shoulder stood a tall gentleman scowling at me. His hair and upturned moustache were fair, his eyes blue, his smooth cheeks and milk-rose complexion that of the typical Saxon; his figure, though inclined to fleshiness, was nevertheless erect, almost stiffly so, apparent notwithstanding the easy hang of his loose though fashionably cut apparel of white serge. He lifted the walking stick he carried and pointed at my prize, repeating his question in excellent English.

"That," said I, recovering self-possession, "is entirely my own affair." And rapidly rolling it up, I placed it out of sight in my bag.

"It's a plan of a fortification."

"Whatever it is, it's my own business. You assume a great deal as a stranger when you catechize me."

"Of a German fortification."

"You made good use of your eyes."

"Let me inquire how and where it came into your possession?"

"By all means."

"You do not give me an answer," he stated after a pause.

"A question is one thing, an answer another. The first may be an annoyance, and the questioner impertinent. I trust, my dear sir, that you catch my full meaning."

What I should do with the map I had no idea; but I did not intend to make it free to any passer-by, least of all a German. Consequently my resentment. On his part a dark flush suffused his face at my words and his eyes blazed hot, but his self-repression was admirable. He lifted his straw hat in scornful acknowledgment and passed up the aisle to his seat in the opposite end of the car.

I considered the incident at an end, for the man was clearly a gentleman, and could account for his conduct only upon the ground of unusual interest or some special knowledge. He was or had been concerned with German army affairs. His swift recognition of the character of the map bespoke an intimate knowledge of military defense, though his questions showed plainly that he did not identify the fortress which it outlined. But, as I was soon to learn, the man had by no means abandoned his purpose of discovering what he wished to know.

That night upon retiring I considered the circumstance of my mild clash with the unknown. The map was in my bag, the bag under the berth, sleep descending upon the travelers as evidenced by more or less wheezy aspirations, and the aisle would presently be a dim and curtained lane in which any trespasser could move with little fear of detection.

The map would be far safer by my person. Taking it out of its receptacle, I folded it carefully into a flat package and slipped around it a rubber band. Thus it was compact and could later be carried in a pocket. Sometime in the night I awoke. My curtains were stirring gently as by a touch. A low sound of something being dragged came to my alert ear; the German, if the German it was, was now engaged in the very depredation which I had anticipated. A sudden lurch of the car threw the night prowler against my berth, with which I sprang up, lunged forward, and thrust forth a hand to catch him. Out upon the thief I fell in a whirl of bed-clothing and curtains in a mad endeavor to get a grip on his limbs. Over and over we rolled and twisted, struggling in the dim reduced light; I could distinguish nothing of the man, only feel his body. Then came a muttered curse, an upheaval, the patter of retreating feet, and I remained alone and wrapped like some netted animal, to extricate myself at leisure. When finally I stood up, pajama-clad, rumpled, annoyed, I beheld the astonished porter before me, while sticking out from between hangings were half a dozen heads.

"Fo' Heaven sake, suh, what you doin'?" the negro exclaimed.

"Trying to catch a thief," I said shortly.

"They ain't no thieves in this car, fo' I'se wide awake and would have seen 'em."



"But it was a thief."

"No, suh, yo' mistaken, I don't 'low thieves round."

"Then it was no doubt a phantom," I retorted, "or a dinosaur, with which I was wrestling here on the floor."

"That's all right, suh, everything's quiet now. Yo' can sleep some mo'. I'll see none of them nightmare animals like you mention runs 'round in the aisle."

To such grinning incredulity there was no reply. I returned to bed. As for the German he would go, as was now apparent, to greater lengths than I had imagined from his single accidental attempt to look at the map. Truly, this strange property was already beginning to exercise a potency, a growing capacity for mischief, which promised to involve me in I did not know what difficulties. Well, at any rate, I still kept it unstolen.

The arrangement which I had wired Andrew was that he should meet me at Penosset, the nearest railroad station to Lavouche, in order to convey me and my luggage to the island. The sun was not more regular than Andrew; it was therefore with some surprise that I stepped upon the station platform and found nothing of my servant. I approached the agent, a gaunt, stooped, melancholy individual, and inquired if my telegram had been forwarded to Lavouche. It had not; on the contrary, it was still on file in the depot office; no one

had called for it, he explained, and when I protested that telegrams were to be delivered, he scratched his chin-whisker and answered, "We ain't much in a hurry here in Penosset." Of that he spoke truly, for the town appeared abandoned, mouldy and ready to tumble down; behind it a small swale ran somewhere southward, a creek when the tide was out, an estuary of the sea when the tide was in; the few ramshackle buildings were blackened by fogs and mists and looked all the more dismal because of the melancholy pines in which they sat. All was dissolution.

As Lavouche was, however, but two or three miles away, I determined to walk the distance instead of trying to find some vehicle in this hopeless town with which to convey myself to my destination. I turned about, after making sure of the road I should take, and started down the platform. A man stood before me — lo, the German! Where he had kept himself out of observation on the train, I had no idea; in any case he had succeeded in doing so, for I had not seen him since the night before. Here he was for a fact, his blond moustache carefully brushed upward at the ends in the manner of his autocratic Emperor, straw hat set squarely on his head and his eyes upon me intent with purpose.

"In the matter of that map —"

He courteously raised his hat as he spoke; but I immediately cut him off without permitting a finish of his statement.

"See here, whoever you are, did you stop off the train in order to bring up this subject?"

"Yes."

"Then you have your trouble for your pains," said I, marching past him, "and a long wait in this deserted town. Good day, sir."

Striding briskly forward, I entered the wood and set out along a sandy road that led eastward towards the seashore. On either side stood a thin growth of pines, breaking the sunshine into patches and blots, spreading their odor of balsam upon the air to mingle with the salty smell of the sea. Coarse grass struggled up in bunches here and there between the tracks cut in the sand by cart-wheels; the boughs about me swayed and sighed in the light breeze. And altogether the afternoon, now not far from sunset, was as charming a one in which to be abroad as the road was pleasant to follow.

Presently the pines thinned, then ceased, and the track winding its way for two hundred yards or so through sparsely grassed sand-dunes at last opened upon the beach. What a beautiful picture it was! I halted to give myself a full deep draught of the scene. Far northward, so far that it was scarcely distinguishable, I could make out the lighthouse that guarded this part of the coast; southward and not half a mile away, the long round-backed rock *La Dent* thrust itself directly across the beach and extended into the sea. Directly before me stretched

the curving strand, washed by combers that unrolled their fringe of foam with steady insistent sound. The sun just touching the tips of the pines still slanted on the sea; the swaying surface melted into gold, while the top of the swells, broken into a hundred tiny waves by a gentle breeze, sparkled and flashed from every facet. Even as I gazed the sun sank behind the wood. A shadow crept forth upon the water, the rosy warmth faded from the beach, leaving it dead and gray; the waves no longer shot flashing beams, and only the sails of a boat far out yet held the golden light.

With a sigh of satisfaction I turned and set my feet for *La Dent*, on the farther side of which lay the village. The north end of the island was visible, its cliff-face surmounted by wood, peeping out beyond the end of the huge protecting ridge of *The Tooth*. Leisurely, contented in mind, glad with the wide gladness of the sea, I walked on, keeping close to the border of flotsam cast up by the waves. Each roller curved forward, uncurled its crest and breaking spread swiftly up the sand almost to my feet in a glassy sheet surfaced with bubbles. In the line of drift were tiny spiral shells, knots of sea-weed, buds torn off submarine plants, water-worn sticks, all the curious and fragmentary plunder that stirs imagination as to the unknown realms in that world beneath the sea.

Out of my abstraction I was all at once roused by a figure which emerged before me from the

his walking stick shifted and gripped the wood. I gathered myself, alert, tense, keeping a watchful eye on his every move. He drew his hat more firmly upon his head.

“For the last time, will you give it to me?”

“No.”

The stick flashed up, then swiftly descended. Had it fallen upon its mark, my skull would have been cracked; the weapon was stout and the force impelling it savage. But I swerved aside, at the same instant leaning forward and shooting my fist against the man's jaw. His cane barely brushed my shoulder; my knuckles however caught his chin squarely; he staggered, his hat spun off, rolling on the sand. Without waiting to measure the effect of my blow I struck again, and this time he dropped full length.

I stood over him rubbing my bruised knuckles. His figure was relaxed, his fingers lay limply open from which the stick had dropped, his eyes were closed. He stirred, while his lips twitched; a groan issued from his lips. It was a knock-out I had given him, clean, quick, and one — I smiled grimly — that the man would not soon forget. But, beyond his temporary senselessness and the sore jaw he would nurse to-morrow, the fellow was uninjured. So seizing my bag I set off at a good pace and ten minutes later I was mounting the round brown back of *La Dent*. A cart road twisted up where the acclivity was easiest, but I remembered a shorter path that the fishermen used and up this made my way.

And all the while my mind revolved around the map. What next! So far, and when only twenty-four hours out of the oaken chest, it had brought me to blows. Like the fisherman of the Arabian tale who opened a vessel drawn up in his net, I had released a genie of trouble; would I, like him, succeed in restoring it to its jar?

When I reached the top of the rock, I paused and turned about for a last look at my antagonist.

"Of all things under heaven!" I exclaimed in astonishment.

For there three hundred yards distant on the sandy beach, plodding steadily towards me, came the indefatigable German.

## CHAPTER III

### AN AFTERNOON AT LAVOUCHE

Stag Lodge — so named because here in an early day my father shot an elk which had wandered from the mainland, whose head now surmounted the great fireplace — stood at the southern end of the island. Behind it spread the fragrant wood; before it a gentle slope, upon which grew only an occasional tree or clump of bushes, ran down to the beach. The structure was a plain, solid, unpretentious one, of a single story, low-roofed, wide, and built of natural logs. A spacious veranda extended entirely around it; a lofty pine guarded its door, past whose trunk a path descended to a small wharf; within, there were half a dozen rooms, one a living-room, rafted with heavy beams, paneled in oak, furnished as my father had loved it with plain massive furniture, rugs, books, a few sea-pictures, old pewter, and having in its end the aforementioned great stone fireplace.

Here it was on the second day after my arrival that I sat snug before the crackling hearth while a storm raged without. Even in summer when a gale sweeps the island a fire is welcome, for a nor'easter brings a sharp edge to the Maine coast; and

so, while the boughs lashed the roof and the rain beat the windows, I sat with legs outstretched and smoked a pipe in abundant comfort. The hurricane had burst the night of my coming to Lavouche and was only now beginning to diminish in fury. Therefore, I reflected, every one had kept indoors and the Moores knew not that they had me for a neighbor.

"You've not seen any of them?" I asked Andrew.

He sat opposite me, his soles toasting before the flame, a churchwarden pipe in his hand.

"No, Master Charles." He persisted in addressing me as he had done when I was a youngster and as he would in all probability continue to do during the rest of his life. "No, Master Charles, I've not. But then I've been very busy preparing the Lodge. You'll be very glad to see them, I'm sure, and they'll be very glad to see you."

Andrew was stout and old and deliberate. He had devoted his life to service in the family of Woodworths; he could not conceive so impossible a thing as anybody not being glad to see a Woodworth. Moreover I did not attempt to instruct him that such might be the state of mind of the Moores.

Presently he said, "Yes, Mr. Moore will be charmed to see you — as he was always delighted to see your father."

"Are he and Betty here alone?"

"Oh, no, indeed. Jean informed me, when he



brought the provisions for the pantry, that there is, besides Mr. Moore and his daughter, a young lady who is visiting Miss Betty, and two gentlemen — quite a houseful, Master Charles.”

Of conversing with Andrew I never wearied. His style carried a reminiscence, a first fragrance of that period when as a young man he had been trained by my grandfather — the period of hair-sofas, wax flowers, crinolines, and Civil War ballads. He had remained in that age.

“Quite a houseful for a fact,” I said.

“Yes, but Moore House is large.”

“True.”

“And Miss Betty likes people about.”

“Also true.”

“She will rejoice to see you, Master Charles, I’m sure” — he paused, thoughtfully puffing his pipe — “for I think she has a fond affection for you, indeed I do.”

“What leads you to that conclusion, Andrew?”

“Because two weeks ago, as I was polishing the door-plate of the house in New York, she came up the step and addressed me. She was but newly returned from South America, where she had been sojourning, and she inquired after you, Master Charles, and I said you were very well. ‘I hope he will do no foolish thing because of the letter I wrote,’ said she. I said, ‘He’s already done it, Miss Betty; he’s been gone a wanderer these two years.’ Then she stood awhile looking sorrowful.

So I know her tender heart was grieved. In consequence I said, 'I'll write to Master Charles to come home.' And she cried out, 'No, no! But I would like to see him, Andrew, if he were here.'"

"The deuce she did!"

"Yes, and then she went away. So I think she has a fond affection for you."

"Not at all," said I.

"I do, indeed."

We sat and smoked in silence, but at last I grew restive. I could no longer sit in peace while the wild hope he had awakened struggled in my breast, so against Andrew's protest I drew on my oilskins. Action was what I needed; I would breast my way against the gale to the village, for, as it was, this was the second day I had been cooped up. Out of the house therefore I made my way, sluiced as I went with rain and buffeted by roaring gusts.

Evidences however that the storm was spending itself were at hand. Now and again a lull occurred between the fierce blasts of wind; the rain no longer dashed down steadily, but blew across the sea in lessening squalls, and this storm-veil which blotted out all sight was half the time but fog and spin-drift; overhead the clouds were breaking, permitting brief fleeting bars of sunshine to shoot slanting down on earth or sea, while far out along the horizon there glimmered a pale and azure light that betokened a welcome change of weather. I fol-

lowed the western beach to the village. Huge waves pursued each other along the black waters, a heavy surf thundered on all shores, and *The Throat*, choked with storm-driven floods, boiled and tossed in a mad current not born of any tide.

Coming down from his little patch of garden which lay in a clearing in the fringe of pines near-by the village, I perceived Gaspard Levesque. He was a little, withered old fellow, the boat-maker of the community and an inveterate though harmless gossip. Next after God he loved his boats, his vegetables, and good talk. He was bent over by much carpentering, but he was spry, and both fingers and tongue were very nimble.

"Hola, is it you, Charles?" he exclaimed, peering at me from under his hat. "I heard that you passed through the village two evenings ago upon your arrival. It's long and you are big since last you were here." He shook my hand, delighted, chattering.

"You're no older to-day than yesterday, this year than the twenty past, uncle," I answered.

"Ah, except in the left leg, which is worthless with rheumatism."

"And Lavouche — tell me all the news."

"Alas, we've had many changes, many unfortunate changes."

Coming into the village and to his house, which was at the near end of the street, we entered the workshop, one large single room which comprised

the whole ground floor. In the rear there was a wide arched door, now closed, through which boats could be brought or dispatched on rollers, a door wide enough to allow the passage of a great wain. An odor of new pine permeated the air; on the walls were suspended tools and bundles of wood; boards were piled along the sides; over the floor were strewn little heaps of shavings; while on a pair of cross-trees rested an upturned boat.

Lavouche had been, I soon perceived from his account, not greatly disturbed by events; indeed, its life these fifteen years past was for the most part placid as the sea on a summer day. Death had come now and again among its members, as might be expected and in the natural pursuance of their occupations; births kept the community at its stationary number; and fishing went on very much as God would have it, that is to say, with good years and bad years. All told, the village had now some hundred and fifty souls — two-score of men and an equal number of wives, a dozen youths with numerous maidens ready for marriage, and children thick as shoals of herring. "Yet it was not what it once was, this village," he said with a sigh, "for, look! there are a dozen empty houses along the street. No, three quarters of a century ago Lavouche throve, what with fat fish and occasional and harmless smuggling; but to-day the fish are seldom fat and there is no smuggling at all." True, there had


been some new-comers lately, three or four fellows, who had arrived from Canada and before that from France. They were not however so industrious or peace-loving as the fishermen of Lavouche; they had seen the world at Brest, Rochelle, Quebec, and found the wine of the inn here more to their taste than the spray tossed by fishing-boats. Quarrels were also frequent among them. But if they chose to stay, what could be done? And old Gaspard spread his hands and lifted his brows.

Agreeing with him that nothing whatever could be done, I took my way up the gusty street to where reposed the inn. I remembered the inn-woman vividly, a plump undemonstrative person who sat at her window knitting all day long, rising only to serve her patrons or, if argument grew noisy, to exclaim, "Quiet, quiet!" Her remarkable powers of long silence and brief response had formerly stirred my boyish wonder; now I was curious to see if time had made her more garrulous. But in this anticipation of a change I was to be disappointed; when I had taken a seat near her and she had brought me a goblet of red wine, I opened the conversation, after a glance at the dim rear of the long room where half a dozen men were gathered round a table.

"Do you remember me? I am Charles Woodworth."

"Yes," said she.

"It's been a long time since I had the pleasure



of seeing you, Madame Corbeau. Custom still continues good? All goes well?" A single affirmative answered these questions. "My old playmates must be grown-up men, where are they? There was Antoine Revillion —"

"Here."

"Pierre Trombard?"

"Fishing."

"And Louis Loumes?"

"Drowned."

"Then where is Jean, whom I liked best of all and who now is undoubtedly a big strong fellow? We were of an age, madame, and like brothers. Where can I find Jean?"

She laid down her knitting and uttered a shrill call. A sleepy tousle-headed boy appeared, whom she directed to summon Jean Gervais to come to me from his house; then she went on to state briefly that the fishermen were taking advantage of their present enforced leisure in mending nets. The recollection of the German flashing through my mind, I inquired if she had any information of him. It appeared that he was staying at her inn, a gentleman by the name of Von Hussman, German truly, as I had said, but able to speak French of a sort — not the French of Lavouche — who had come to a quiet place by the sea to recover his health from a stroke. I hid a smile; my pursuer was not, it seemed, without a certain sense of humor.

So he was still here! Well, the storm may have

prevented his departure, but his presence looked to me more like the result of a steady purpose; I would keep an eye out for friend Von Hussman. Here in the village however he was under a handicap. I was among friends, a word from me would bring them crowding to my assistance; on the other hand, he was alone and among people who had a natural antipathy for his race. His courage could not be questioned, I had to admit, and the more I studied his presence the more it loomed as a perplexing problem.

In the midst of my reflections Jean Gervais entered, now a tall, bronzed, smiling fellow, far different from the stripling to whom I bade good-bye years before. The raindrops which dropped from his sou'wester he shook off with a jerk of his head; then we gazed at one another, endeavoring each to recall the boy he had known, marking the changes wrought by time; finally we put forth our hands and gripped them in a clasp that spoke undiminished affection.

"And it is you?" he said, eyes sparkling.  
"You've come back to Lavouche at last."

"And you?"

"Behold!" He opened his arms wide, smiling. Unlike most of the men of the village, he wore neither beard nor moustache; labor at oar, at sail, at nets had thickened his body and broadened his chest; life on the water and in the sharp salt air had given him vigorous health. And now, radiant,

delighted, full of the happiness of seeing me once more, he leaned elbows on the table and gazed into my eyes while we talked.

At the end of half an hour I said, "I want a cat-boat, Jean. Can you get me one?"

"You shall have mine — only —" He hesitated. "Sometimes I would like to use it of a Sunday. When I'm not out with the nets and when the weather is fair, I sail with Marie Deschenel. We're to be married in November."

I clapped him on the shoulder. "Any time — any time you wish it. It will always be on the beach before the Lodge. My felicitations to you on your future joy. I'll come and dance at the wedding."

"You are not married, Charles?" he inquired.

"Not so lucky."

A flash of mischief came into his eyes.

"Ma'm'selle Moore has had me take her sailing already since she arrived; Ma'm'selle loves the water. Now that you have the boat —" He stopped, smiling the suggestion.

"I see; then you'd have no one to look after except Marie. Cunning Jean!"

"Oh, no. But you would find Ma'm'selle charming. There's a young man there" — he made a gesture towards the opposite side of the island where stood Moore House — "from whom she might be pleased to be relieved. He is —" Stopping abruptly, he knit his brows and sank into thought,



oblivious of my presence. Thus he remained until all at once he brushed his hand across his forehead as if to dispel the subject which engaged him, turned to the inn-woman, and ordered a measure of wine. "Forgive me," he apologized, but made no further reference to his abstraction. From now on his talk did not move so cheerfully; a moody shadow still lay upon his countenance.

It was at this moment that an altercation broke forth among the men who sat at the table in the rear of the room. Voices were raised in acrimonious argument. All but two of the drinkers fell silent, but these spat angry words at each other in rapid French. Owing to the dim light which lay in that part of the inn, I could not distinguish their faces; one man was large and at every utterance thumped the board with his fist, the other was small and crouched down in his seat until his head was drawn into his shoulders, but all the while he snapped retorts incessantly.

"Those rotten fish from Marseilles!" growled Jean, and turned back to me.

At that instant the little man shot some word that stung the other to fury. The latter leaned across the table, striking at the speaker with his open palm; but the smaller with unexpected agility leaped from his seat and out of the way of the slap, then he darted forward, rapped and overturned his assailant's goblet of wine, whirled about, and ran for the door. A curse escaped the lips of the larger. He

stared down at the spilled wine for an instant with fallen jaw. Then he seized the heavy glass and hurled it after the fleeing figure; but rage made his aim poor, it went wild, sailing to one side and smashing against the wall over our heads. The little fellow jerked open the door and vanished, while a sprinkle of glass showered Jean and me.

"Here you, Pilon!" my companion cried, springing to his feet.

The thrower came forward, after quenching his thirst uninvited from a companion's goblet. Apparently the wine appeased his anger, for he wiped his moustache and said in a boisterous voice, "Hello, Jean. Nearly hooked you instead of that little cat."

"Monsieur, you must pay," the inn-woman interjected.

"Why not, madame?" With a lordly air he tossed a coin into her lap. "Who is this, Jean?" and he indicated me.

"A friend," Jean replied briefly.

Placing one hand on his hip and stroking his moustache with the other, the roisterer stared me over. Not so tall as Jean or I, yet he had a thick barrel of a body; his eyes were full and protruding, his head large; and he comported himself in that manner which is assumed by certain insolent characters in French towns, a mixture of assured nonchalance, abruptness, egotism, and ferocious swagger.

"I — I am Pilon," said he, and his hand twirled his moustache with a flourish.

I glanced at him indifferently. The information which he contributed did not interest me in the slightest, so I turned to Jean. Under the impression no doubt that I was a visitor from some neighboring fishing-village because I wore oilskins and anxious to stamp his importance upon my mind, he repeated his statement.

"Some people are very tiresome," I remarked to Jean, who was scowling.

"Yes."

"And annoying."

"Exceedingly."

"Ha!" burst in an angry exclamation from the man's lips.

I turned about in my seat.

"What is it you want?" I asked. "Your apology for the broken glass is accepted, therefore nothing remained to be added. You are interrupting us."

At this deflection of the talk he was at a loss what to answer. His eyes moved from me to Jean and from Jean back to me, his mind vainly seeking a point to resent. That he had been drinking freely was evident; his face was darkly flushed, the veins were distended upon his forehead, his cap was awry, and the odor of brandy was strong upon his breath. Past him and still sitting at the table, I perceived the other four men looking at us and attentively listening.

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"I am Pilon," he at last stammered; "I invite you to drink at our table."

"Our wine is before our hands," said Jean.

"Let your friend answer," he growled.

"As Jean says, our wine is here."

"Perhaps you are fastidious — you?" he sneered.

I kept silent, though a retort trembled on the tip of my tongue.

"Or a coward?"

"Pilon, to your table at once!"

It was the inn-woman who commanded, and her mandate was not to be ignored. He glanced at her, hesitated, then cocking his cap rejoined his companions, where he broke out into laughter.

"He's a rogue," Jean said, lighting his pipe. "Because he comes from France, he and two others, the little one who flew out the door from his glass, and that fat keg-fellow at his elbow, Descarte — the others are young men here in Lavouche, who think it fine to swim in such company — because he has traveled, Pilon thinks he will show us what a terrible fellow he is. Well, he leaves me alone. Sometimes he and his mates fish, sometimes not. The three live in the empty house next to this, the house with the iron nails in the door, where Piet' Mosette lived formerly." Awhile he sat glowering, then asked, "What should one of Ma'm'selle Betty's guests have to do with such as Pilon? For I saw one of them go into the door with that braggart yonder." Again a pause, and this time Jean's look

brooded on the table. "Well, for that matter, what should one of them have to do with my sister — he who has been but ten days here?"

"Your sister?" I said.

"My half-sister, to speak accurately. Margot, you remember her?"

I nodded. When last I had seen the girl, she was a dark, slim, vagabondish thing, whose black eyes gleamed from through her unbound hair. Nine years old at that time, she must be twenty-three or four now. It was strange she was not married, for the daughters of the fishermen wed young; yet she had always been a strange girl, given to solitary musings even when small, or to wandering about the island or the coast rocks in elfin loneliness. She was a child by Jean's father's second wife, a woman of St. John who had died two or three years after abiding in Lavouche and who was of another and darker French strain than the fishermen, who were of light complexion and not black. This child had followed her mother's breed of the race in looks and temperament.

"It's peculiar," I said.

"What should he — a secretary, he says he is, to the other gentleman at Moore House — want with a daughter of Lavouche? He is not of us."

"Perhaps he's studying local character," I suggested.

But Jean shook his head moodily, and as our wine was finished and supper-time near we rose to go.

But Pilon was not yet satisfied with his share of the afternoon.

"My fine young rooster, I'll have to cut your comb some day," he shouted across the room. "You — the blood will drip."

"Come along," said Jean, "never mind him, he'll forget all about it." And when we stood in the street, "It will be fine to-morrow, but nevertheless bad fishing for one more day. I'll bring the boat over early in the morning."

At the end of the street I perceived some fifty yards ahead a woman's figure preceding me, clutching a shawl about her head and holding her skirts, which whipped in the wind. She pursued her way where the cliff of rock fell into a gentle grassy slope. Only a casual interest was excited in my mind by her appearance; she might be bent on any one of a dozen errands that would engage any wife of Lavouche; but my look idly followed her, as it will the only animate object in a landscape. She turned and went up to a spot not far from old Gaspard Levesque's garden patch, disappearing behind a clump of bushes. I continued along the beach, and it was only by chance as I drew even with where she had diverged that I glanced in that direction. There, possibly a dozen boat-lengths away, she stood under a tree talking with a man. More than that he wore a rain-coat with collar turned up and a cap I made out nothing of him. As it happened, at the same instant I gazed at them

they turned their faces towards me. I caught the sound of a low exclamation. The man reached forth a hand and drew the woman behind the tree till both were hidden.

"Now that's curious for Lavouche," I thought. "On a first guess, I'd say the one was Jean's sister and the other the secretary."

## CHAPTER IV

### THE ENVOY OF A GOVERNMENT

'At two o'clock the next afternoon I stepped aboard the cat-boat which Jean had brought over to my wharf and beat my way up against the wind close under the lee of the eastern shore. The gale of the previous day had diminished to a fresh breeze, and the broad Atlantic, still heaving in immense swells that rolled from the northeast, sparkled with a thousand gems beneath the brilliant sun. The keen delight of it all, the flash of water, the leap of spray, the slap of wave against bow, the keen, pungent scent of salt, and the song in the sail stirred my pulses and kept them beating joyously. There is something in the aspect of the broad sea, spreading apparently without end, moving without rest, that speaks a challenge. Unconsciously we animate it with a gigantic spirit; we endow it with human qualities that contain something more, something vaster, something beyond our perception; and this very mystery calls to men's souls. This I felt and accepted without analysis; hand on tiller and mechanically directing the boat up the shore until I should reach the open bay beyond, I drank my fill



of all the glorious scene and lost myself in a sensation of physical buoyancy.

But a hail, a feminine hail, interrupted my ecstasy; I returned to matters at hand. Looking up, I perceived fifty yards before me a small wharf and higher up, at the top of the gently sloping, open lawn, Moore House, with portico columns white against the green background of wood. On the wharf were three figures, those of a man and two girls; one of the latter persons waved a handkerchief.

"Jean, Jean, take me with you," she called.

For the fraction of a minute I hesitated, then shifted the tiller a trifle so as to bring the cat-boat alongside the wharf. Betty had recognized Jean's craft; she imagined that she recognized Jean and therein Betty would presently experience a shock, of what nature I did not undertake to prophesy. Carefully keeping the slatting sail between me and the little party, I guided my vessel gently to its mooring.

The trio were evidently torn by discussion of the projected excursion of the signaler.

"You don't want to go out with that fellow again, surely," the man exclaimed.

"Exactly what I do." Betty's voice was firm.

"Oh, stay ashore; you'll be drenched," urged the second girl.

"What's a little drenching!" scorned Betty.

"Better come too." She put her foot on the gun-

wale at the instant of the boat's rise on the swell and sprang lightly in. "Here I am, Jean."

"Well, I—" her male companion began.

"Never mind, Mr. Davis, I see that you too are afraid of a wetting. Push off, Jean."

The white duck skirt, one shoulder, and the back of Betty's golden head were visible to me, but the mast cut off the whole vision of her. Flinging one arm over the tiller, I lighted my pipe and settled back, awaiting developments.

"I'm glad to get away from them, Jean, just at this minute," she stated after a time; "they exasperate me, they're so afraid of a drop of water."

She continued to look straight ahead, talking over her shoulder. For my part, I remained silent; apparently she expected no reply, as she continued to maintain her position in abstracted contemplation. When at last we outreached the island, she lifted her head to the breeze and cried:

"Point her up closer and get out to sea." Then added flippantly, "Stick her nose into it."

"Oui, ma'm'selle," said I meekly.

"Closer!"

Obedient, as a sailor ever should be under captain's command, I pointed the boat into the eye of the wind. The sail swung farther and farther in and stood stiff as a sheet of iron. Slap! A dash of spray leaped high over the bow and sprinkled us briskly.

"Jean!"

"Oui, ma'm'selle?"

"It's glorious — but I'm coming back."

I paid off the sheet and eased up on the tiller, for I expected a gust from another direction when she should pass round the mast and see me; to point up in two winds at once was beyond my nerve. Placing her hand on the mast and carefully watching her footing, she moved round the stick, balanced, and dropped to the seat just in front of me without a glance at her crew of one.

"I am here," she stated with assured confidence.

"Ah, ma'm'selle."

"Now point her —"

Whirling about, she cut off the sentence as with a knife. She stared with round blue eyes and parted lips. She was the same lovely Betty, lovelier in fact, with stray locks blowing about her face, her figure trim in white duck as a sailor girl's should be, and cheeks all aglow with color.

"I was about to propose that we tack out to sea," said I.

"Charles — or his ghost! What are you doing here?"

"Is that intended as a verdict of disapprobation?" I questioned.

"I thought you were in Texas."

"Even you, Betty, may err."

She gazed at me speculatively, as she would have done at a seal or a porpoise, had she suddenly discovered that such sat in the stern steering the craft.

"And you are here."

"That is my present conviction."

"You were a cowboy."

"Well, now I'm a sailor."

"And came to Lavouche."

"To Lavouche."

"Ah."

"Exactly."

And so our conversation simmered down to a mutual gaze. But Betty's, I presently perceived, while dwelling on me passed through and beyond and traversed a wider field. What her reflections might be I could only conjecture: she sat rapt, her lips parted, her eyes fixed, her person immovable. I watched her awhile, then gave my attention to examining sail and sea. When I returned to consideration of her countenance, she was still transfixed.

All at once she burst out: "How did you come here?"

"How should I? By boat and train."

"No, no, I mean — What did Andrew write you? I demand to know."

"Andrew? About things in general. Weather — the house — the mice in the closet — this and that."

"Did he write about me? Did he dare do that?"

"Andrew never wrote about anything one-thousandth part so interesting. Andrew is faithfully

careful never to write about anything that does not concern that old and honored family, the Woodworths."

She was but half assured. "And never mentioned my name?"

"I can state positively that your name never appeared in any letter."

"Then you did not follow me to Lavouche?"

"I did n't even know that you were back from Venezuela until I reached New York, and at that time my arrangements were completed to come here. You may rest easy, I did not follow you."

For the space of a minute she remained silent, while the boat slipped over the rise of a swell and glided down into the hollow beyond.

"You might have been gallant enough to say that you did," she remarked shortly.

"Gallant enough! Do you suggest that you would have been pleased to have me follow you?"

"Never!"

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing of importance. Kindly take me back now."

Her look was turned away. Leaning one elbow on her knee and resting her chin in the cup of her hand, she gazed at the water and apparently ignored my presence. Of all enigmatical, vexing persons! Without a word, but with resentment in my heart, I swung the boat around and let it sweep before the wind straight for the island. She continued to con-

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concentrate her look upon the water, and I, equally silent, tended tiller and sail.

"Thank you," she said, as she stepped upon the wharf. "I've enjoyed the hour."

"I shall treasure that expression of enthusiasm," I responded dryly.

"Sometime again perhaps — in the future —"

"Yes, the dim and distant future."

"And I must go. I am late. I promised to play *écarté* with Señor Del Hervalle."

At that name I nearly upset the boat, springing to my feet.

"Who!" I demanded in excitement.

"Did you learn to shout in that fashion at the top of your lungs while in Texas? I said Señor Del Hervalle, one of our guests."

I looked past her up the slope, where I observed several persons moving about the lawn. The news dumfounded me. Del Hervalle — D'Urville here, a guest of the Moores!

"That infamous scoundrel!" I burst out.

"You're speaking of one of our company, sir."

"Of course I am — if it's Del Hervalle of Venezuela."

"One of our friends," she continued haughtily.

"He ought to be hung, the blackguard!"

Her head was very straight, her chin high.

"Our acquaintance is barely renewed when you cast reflections on a man you know nothing of, holding an honored position and our guest. Your ex-

perience in Texas seems to have impaired your courtesy — I will not go so far as to say manners." After a pause she went on. "And therefore it had best not be renewed at all."

"As you please."

"And I am generally occupied with my visitors."

"I expect to be pretty busy myself."

"And so —" She looked at me coldly.

"Exactly. One favor, if you please. Be so kind as not to mention my name to Señor Del Hervalle."

"I imagine he'll hardly be interested."

"Ah! there may be two opinions about that."

"You know him?"

"It's immaterial — a casual acquaintance once, I may say. You've not yet granted my request."

"Certainly I'll not mention you."

"Then we can part and meet hereafter as strangers," I said, pushing the boat away. "So that is settled."

A visible struggle was going on in her mind, I perceived, watching her out of the corner of my eye. She took a step, then halted, to face about again. Perplexity, curiosity, doubt sat on her brow; her blue eyes dwelt on me, questioning. At last she succumbed.

"When did you meet him?"

I smiled and shook out the sheet to the breeze. "At the muzzle of a revolver — informally, as one would say."

With that reply to prick her wonder, I scudded

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away. Once I cast a glance over my shoulder and observed her still standing on the wharf staring after me.

It appeared presently that others had been interested in my sailing. When I beached the cat-boat and mounted the path to the Lodge, I was met by Andrew standing in the door. A visitor had called during my absence, waited awhile, and finally taken his departure; from the description which Andrew drew it could have been no one but my German. He had inquired for me, sat for a quarter of an hour upon the veranda where he enjoyed the sea breeze and the prospect, then expressed a desire to see the interior of the dwelling, which he had highly praised. A gleam of suspicion flashed through me. I rushed into the house and unlocked and jerked open the drawer where I had placed the map. Thank Heaven, it was still safe!

"Andrew, that man's an enemy," I announced.

"Can it be, Master Charles! He was so polite and so interested."

"And wanted to know how the rooms were arranged, I presume, and the doors and windows?"

"No, Master Charles."

"Well, no doubt he used his eyes. He wants this paper, Andrew. It has a particular value, and must be hid where no one can lay finger on it."

Andrew folded his hands across his stomach and considered.

"There is the bottom of the desk," he suggested;

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but I shook my head. "Or the chimney seat, where your father sometimes kept books." This was no better. "Or the —" He paused.

"We have n't a secret panel or hole under the hearth-stone, such as novels always provide in their houses, worse luck."

"No, Master Charles, but I was going to suggest —"

"Lead on."

"To suggest that if the paper was concealed in some good place which the man would not naturally suspect he would not find it."

"Andrew, you have uttered a remarkable statement," I rejoined with gentle irony.

A glow came into his eyes; he began to rub his hands softly together.

"Your father used to say that I sometimes thought of things no one else in the world ever did."

"Father was an observant man."

"So he was, extraordinarily observant, and therefore I might think of a place no one else would ever consider. And it has come to my mind, Master Charles, that seeing this man is your enemy and anxious to secure the paper, he might never think to look for it in the bottom of the silver tankard which holds the sherry wine. Your father once had some money here when a number of rough fellows stopped at Lavouche. I hid it there for him. He said my suggestion was a good one and that

the money would undoubtedly be preserved if kept in spirits." He beamed upon me immensely satisfied.

"The map would be soaked and spoiled."

"Oh, no; I will make a rubber cover to encase it and then put it in a flat silver dish with a water-tight screw lid which is in the dish closet. This will fit into the bottom with a little wedge, and when the tankard is full of wine no one will imagine it there. I shall have it ready by to-morrow."

I leaned back in my chair.

"Andrew," said I, "you have the making of a great criminal in you."

"Your father sometimes complimented me on my ideas. I'm so much about the house that I observe things that others are not likely to see. I will make the rubber sack this evening."

"Very well, I leave that part to you, and there's no immediate danger in my carrying it until you have your little cache ready." And I slipped it into an inner pocket.

Complacently pleased that I had adopted his plan, he brought the screw-top dish and the tankard to demonstrate his ingenious place of secretion. It was quite as he said; the dish fitted neatly into the depth of the tankard and, indeed, when the latter should be full of wine would, unless careful examination were made, be mistaken for the bottom of the receptacle. A thorough thief would he be who would discover the map in such a place.

That evening I ate my supper in silence, for there was more than enough fresh matter in the occurrences of the day to give my mind occupation. My present status, or rather lack of it, in Elizabeth Moore's regard was for one thing sufficiently engrossing. She had administered a dismissal that afternoon which should according to the usual conventions mark the end of our acquaintance and my hopes; this I revolved moodily, refusing to accept the decree. Suddenly I straightened up. She expected me to fade out of her life in silence and with averted head like a melancholy wraith; well, I should do nothing of the kind, not if I knew myself. There should be no withdrawal on my part, to cherish in solitude a sweet and lonely memory; on the contrary, I should follow Jack Maitland's advice and "get busy." A sense of calm confidence on a sudden pervaded me; here was a chance to emulate the Roman warriors who stole Sabine wives, or the noble redman who went forth and brought him a helpmeet into his lodge. Not quite that, of course, but if Texas had rubbed the grain off my manners I would at least convince Miss Betty that there was iron under the velvet.

Pushing back my chair, I filled my pipe and passed into the room where the fire was blazing on the hearth. One question determined, I was immediately confronted by another. What stand should I take with D'Urville? The difficulty of the situation was apparent, while the obstacles in the

way of laying the rogue by the heels were numerous ; for it was no longer a humble mine-mechanic with whom I had to deal, but a man of rank clothed with the protection of a foreign nation, an envoy with privileges and honors, in reality a guest of my own government. In the end I might secure his recall, but nothing more. D'Urville was a dangerous man. Once he learned that my purpose was to disclose his former roguery, he would without question make a counter-stroke of some kind. It would be necessary to go with cautious steps and prepared hands when I went to his unmasking. He was wise in years, while I was young ; he had experience in craft, practice in dissembling, skill in calculating narrow chances, coolness in danger, all the weapons with which to wage a concealed and relentless warfare where mercy is not shown and quarter never given, while against these I had only youth to pit, courage, and knowledge of his desperate character and evil past. It was a prospect to make one draw back, yet the contest lured me on.

As a preliminary I decided upon a survey of Moore House — a flicker of curiosity too was in the decision, a desire to see again the face of this man who had been an ancient enemy and with whom I was about to renew hostilities.

At about nine o'clock, accordingly, I buttoned my coat snugly, took a Scotch cap for my head, and set out.

I made my way by a path cut through the wood,

which led to the road that ran from Moore House to the village. A full moon shone in the sky, whose beams penetrated through the wide-spreading boughs of the trees in lances and arrows of mellow light. All was quiet as I strode along the soundless carpet of pine needles; an odor of balsam filled the air, the heavy shadows laid themselves here like black cloaks, and only the steady insistent music of the waves rolling upon the beach beat in my ears. Coming into the road, which was scarcely better lighted, I turned to the right and continued my advance. Moore House reposed, I remembered, not more than a hundred yards from the junction of path and road, and presently I saw its gleaming lights.

About the house a considerable space had been cleared years before, but certain natural features had been preserved — clumps of trees, bushes, small copses. I halted in the shadow of a huge tree that stood in the fringe where the road debouched and examined the structure of the dwelling. The south side faced me, the servants' entrance was north, while the columned front opened eastward and overlooked the ocean. In the wide spaces of the lawn the moon shone full and clear, marking every inequality, every upstanding stick and stalk. No one was in sight, so I stepped forward and by taking advantage of cover worked my way around in front and in close to the large veranda. The wide door stood open, through which lamplight fell from the hall, but that was all I noted.

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Presently came the sound of voices, and there stepped through the door Elizabeth, the other girl, and Mr. Moore. The latter's slender figure moved between those of his companions, and his thin, smooth-shaven face appeared for an instant in the light; an indulgent smile was on his lips, and he was speaking in the perfectly modulated tones I knew so well. My position was not particularly enviable; if I retreated they would no doubt perceive my moving figure in the moonlight, and if I remained they might come straight upon my bush to discover me crouching behind it; explanations of my skulking position would be embarrassing. But it seemed that fortune was for the time upon my side, as they paused, chatted a moment, and proceeded in a leisurely stroll down the slope towards the water, as if attracted by the beauty of the moonlit sea.

With a sigh of relief I watched them depart. Next instant thought of them was forgotten by the appearance of another figure in the doorway — a compact, plump little figure; D'Urville, no other, he himself though masking as Señor Del Hervalle, a Venezuelan! He stepped forward until he stood beside one of the white, lofty columns. A tall shrub close to the position he occupied was within my line of vision, screening me from sight. Hardly taking thought and by a sudden impulse which urged me to obtain a nearer and clearer view of him, I bent low and stole to this shelter, where peeping

round I beheld the man not ten feet away. He wore a black frock coat buttoned tightly about his form, and the years had used him well, for he was plumper than ever. In the manner of his former days he wore his beard close cropped and moustaches waxed to fine points. He stood looking out into the night, arms folded, meditating. Here was no longer the modest self-effacing mechanic who used to go about Forge mines in a greasy workman's jumper, but a man of affairs; the air of constant deference which he had exhibited at Forge was gone and in its place one of resolute dignity and impressive power, as befitted an envoy of a nation. Indeed, his very body seemed to have fed on more royal food.

For a long time he stood motionless, immersed in contemplation of the beauty of the night, so different from that of the tropical country he had left, or busily engaged in weaving plots. Doubtless the latter; his crafty mind was not apt long to indulge in aught that promised little profit. I watched him. After all, the matter rested solely with me; the man had everything to gain by burying the past and maintaining his present honorable position, and it would only be when I forced him to defense that he would assume active hostilities. D'Urville was, as I had well learned, no fool. Despite his guilty career, I grudgingly rendered him a meed of admiration; for in order to rise out of a questionable and obscure past in the brief period of two short years to the place he now held, it had required brains

and uncommon ability. Castro was no easy man to win a road to, nor a light master to serve. Yet this thing D'Urville had accomplished, and he a foreigner, trod all the crooked road to favor, avoided the byways of betrayal, escaped the pitfalls of spite, threaded the labyrinth of opposing interest, hatred, jealousy, and intrigue, until he now stood as the Venezuelan president's trusted lieutenant. Was it a wonder, then, that while gazing at the figure of the man who stood motionless, with moonlight all about him, I hesitated what to do?

But at that instant matters took an unexpected turn, and I knew at once hesitation was no longer to be my course. As stated, I crouched behind a bush not ten feet from the position which D'Urville occupied and slightly on one side. Behind me there was an open space extending to the angle which marked the south end of the house. It was around this corner my assailants must have come, for all at once I heard a light step on the turf at my back, then before I could turn my head a weight fell on me and I was crushed to earth. A twig of the bush behind which I had stooped sharply scratched my cheek as I performed my involuntary abasement, and my face was pressed down into the sod. Spitting out grass and dirt, I instinctively drew myself together to cast off this incubus which lay upon my frame; a sudden heave of my body, a quick upward stroke of my elbow into the man's stomach, and he loosened his hold with a hearty



groan. I struggled to my knees, but a second man leaped at me, seized my wrists, and locked them behind my back in a grip I could not break; at the same time his groaning comrade scrambled to his feet and administered a grievous kick in my ribs. I looked over my shoulder and saw the white impassioned face of the young man who had attempted that afternoon to dissuade Elizabeth Moore from taking her sail with me; he was drawing back his foot to deal another blow when my captor, whom I could not see, growled:

"Hold on there — stop that! Don't kick him when he's down."

But rage had wholly mastered the other; he swung his whole strength behind his toe and caught me in the side. I was on my knees; had it not been for the sustaining grip on my wrists I should have fallen forward, and as it was I turned faint, while a sharp pain darted through my chest, compelling me to grit my teeth in order to utter no sound. After a moment I glanced up again. The fellow had withdrawn a pace and remained quiet, though yet convulsed with passion.

"You coward, I'll pay that score some day," I said.

"None of that talk," the man behind me cried gruffly, and with a jerk that seemed to crack my shoulder blades pulled me to my feet.

"Ha! what have you here, Davis?" broke in the voice of a new participant.

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It was D'Urville. Attracted by the sound of our scuffle, he had advanced to the spot and now stood before me, his bright eyes shining whitely in the pale light.

"A spy," said the young man who had dealt the kicks.

"Ha, a spy! Bring him into the house."

Into the house we went, therefore, and my feelings were those of consternation when, as we stepped under the portico, I heard the voices of Mr. Moore and the young ladies, who were now ascending the slope. D'Urville had not so far recognized me, which was hardly to be expected, since my cap was pushed over my eyes and the scratch on my cheek, the smear of dirt and grass on my face, must have given me all the appearances of a ruffian. The servant, for so he proved to be, kept a firm and undiminished grip on my wrists yet held behind my back, in all probability imagining that he guarded some desperate housebreaker. The others preceded me until we stopped in the wide hallway, where D'Urville swung about.

"A spy — and here in Lavouche," he said, his little black eyes moving over my person. Then in a businesslike tone, which hinted at considerable practice in similar affairs, "Search him."

His secretary, pale and determined, unbuttoned my coat, patted my pockets, and at last, feeling the folded map, thrust his hand into my breast and drew it out.

D'Urville stood motionless. Then he poured out a rapid stream of utterance, low and imperative, to his secretary.

"Take this to the place you know. Conceal it. It threatens us. Act swiftly. Ask no questions, but conceal it. Now, at once!" And plunging his hand into his breast once again, D'Urville drew out the map. "That stair — that stair — Avoid every one. Make haste."

Davis sprang forward, his sallow face illuminated by the knowledge that there was imperative need to act. Intrigue he was familiar with, an adept in; he needed no second word. Seizing the map, he swiftly, noiselessly leaped up the stair just as Mr. Moore and the two girls stepped within the hall.

At sight of us they halted dumfounded. But I had already made my resolution, waited but this instant when the servant was looking away from me and at them to put it into execution. With a sudden wrench I tore myself free. A bound and I was at the stair and darting upward four steps at a time. Davis's coat-tails were just disappearing along the hall. Behind me all was confusion.

"I've spilled the broth now," said I, as I reached the top step.

## CHAPTER V

### HOW A DOCUMENT MAY ACQUIRE IMPORTANCE

Davis cast a flying glance back, then vanished around an angle in the hall. One intense purpose dominated me — to recapture the map; and this I resolved to do even if necessary to follow the man into his very room. But such refuge was apparently not his goal, for he kept straight on until finally darting into a side passage I saw him dash from sight down the servants' stair; memory of its location leaped into my mind, for as a child I had more than once pursued Betty along this very runway, when we had quarreled over a division of cake or when in a flash of temper she had knocked over my house of blocks. So early as that she and I had not agreed. Those were pursuits which ended in nothing more than a pull of her braid of hair; this one would have a more serious end if the fellow sought to retain the chart. For I meant to have it at all costs.

Down I clattered after him, rushed through a group of startled servants standing motionless in the kitchen, and burst out a rear door. Ten yards in advance ran Davis bareheaded. I saw the folded map in his hand. Fear perhaps winged his feet;

but anger gave me speed and I gained upon him. Around the corner of the house he ran; I closed up and reached to seize him, but he swerved towards the wood. By a quick sprint I overtook him, sprang on his back, and he went down with a strangled cry beneath my weight. I wrested the paper from his resistless hand and still resting a knee upon his body put the prize away in my breast-pocket. Strongly tempted as I was to give him a drubbing, the sight of his pallid face and rolling eyes restrained me; he was not a strong man, not so strong as the average, nowhere near so strong as I, and though the soreness in my side still kept fresh the recollection of his dastardly kick it would have been the extreme of brutality to retaliate on so helpless an adversary.

“Stand up!” I ordered.

He rose stiffly, silently, and stood motionless. His face was even paler now than it had been before, since I stood close before him, keeping one hand on his arm. He was breathing in short labored inhalations, and his lips worked in jerks and twitches; a physical coward, I set him down, and now in a terrible state of apprehension. Placing his hand upon his bosom as if pressing back a pain in the region of his heart, he whipped out a dagger and lunged at me as swiftly as a cornered animal strikes. Its flash in the moonlight gave warning, and I sprang to one side, but not in time to escape a ripped sleeve. I pulled him to me, knocked up the hand holding the weapon, and sent it flying out upon the turf.

"You attempt murder, do you?" I said, now gripping his arm until I knew it ached.

But he remained silent as ever, as if he had lost power of speech; only his black eyes were staring large and luminous. He made no resistance. Fright had completely mastered him, and I looked at him in curiosity. His frame was frail; there was a vague indefinable suggestion in his features, a mixture of races that hinted at several and bespoke none, hybridity. The whole person of him suggested an underlying unnaturalness of character and constitution, and yet one could not lay a finger on anything tangible. It was difficult to imagine that he was the same person who had a short time previous leaped on my back: where had he found the courage? A curious anomaly! Now he was as putty; yet despite his fear of what I might do, of terror of physical pain that held him unresisting and dumb, I was conscious that there was present in his look a passion of hatred that no fear, however great, could wholly subdue.

"Get away from here," I said in disgust. "Go back to your master."

Obedient as an automaton he walked towards the door and, my anger dissipated, I watched him still curious as to the kind of creature he was. Then I moved to the spot where the dagger had fallen and raised it from where it lay with shining blade upon the grass; it was more of a stiletto than anything else, thin and needle-pointed and with a handle of

silver. I would keep it, for it was fairly my spoil; and it would be a relic to have of a strange man and an unusual evening. After all, I had not lost any property by my adventure; I still had the map. And yet, stay! Had I not lost something, or rather acquired a new menace? Heretofore the map had only got me the German for an enemy, but now D'Urville, who had been conversant with Douglass's plans and plots, indeed, a partner in them, and who consequently knew all about this paper, would also become an active striver for its possession. He was well aware what fort it represented; doubtless he had assisted in determining what market it should go into; at any rate, he was fully apprised of its high value as a secret and that was enough to spur him to action for its acquisition. More fool I for thinking to unmask the scoundrel and put him on the defensive; Charles Woodworth was the man who would now need to take good care how he walked.

D'Urville's attack however lay somewhere in the future. A nearer complication of the comedy just completed lay in the explanation which of course I must make to Mr. Moore. My presence, my strange situation as a prisoner in the hands of one of the house servants, my sudden and spectacular race up stairs and down through his dwelling, was an affair that must have aroused his astonishment and could not go unchallenged. Clearly there was only one course to follow, but how much to tell —

ah, that was the trouble. So with meditative feet I made my way to the door.

The actors in the scene which had occurred in the hall, with the exception of myself, still stood upon the spot, while beyond them servants' heads showed crowding doors. Davis was the center of interest now, but spoke briefly, evidently under the restraint of Del Hervalle's cautioning eye. Undoubtedly the envoy would have much preferred to make explanations himself, but of what had occurred on the lawn between Davis and me he was ignorant and must of necessity patiently accept a minor rôle. I removed my cap and stepped in, forgetful that I still had all the appearance of a ruffian. The servant who had assisted in my capture at once advanced to meet me and renew his frustrated policy duty, but Mr. Moore waved him aside.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"I — why, Charles Woodworth," I stated.

His eyebrows lifted the fraction of an inch; a diplomat, however, is always master of himself, or supposed to be, so with a keen glance he scrutinized my face, then extended his hand in recognition.

"So you are — but somewhat decorated. Your presence is welcome, as we are seeking a solution of this singular affair. Have you turned burglar?"

"No; it was I who was robbed."

"My servant and Mr. Davis state that they came round the house, saw a man skulking across the lawn and behind a bush, and captured him."



"I was the man," I answered promptly.

"The evidence of your face points that way."

"Let me explain. As I approached the house I perceived this gentleman" — I bowed to the envoy — "and paused to look at him. I had met him under other and less estimable circumstances and naturally was interested at finding him here on the island of Lavouche. I desired to observe him before introducing myself anew, in order to make sure I was not laboring under a mistake. Then these other two men fell in an avalanche upon my back and haled me here."

"You knew Señor Del Hervalle, you say?"

"Very well, indeed, but under another alias. At that time, which was two years ago this summer, he was a mechanic in the west. Jack Maitland also shares his acquaintance."

Mr. Moore turned to D'Urville. "This is peculiar, yet evidently a case of mistaken identity, Señor. You were in Venezuela at the time, were you not?"

"Of a certainty, yes, as you know, Señor Moore."

Mr. Moore turned to me. "Charles, you've confused my guest with some one else. Apologies all around will end this peculiar *contretemps*. Señor Del Hervalle has been in Venezuela for years, as President Castro himself told me, and was born there of French parentage, later educated in France."

I turned and looked D'Urville full in the eye; his

past had, it now appeared, been effectually buried with the connivance of the president whom he served and who would find such an amending of the record very easy to contrive. As for the little Frenchman — consummate actor! — he smiled at me blandly, even kindly, as experience smiles forgiveness on the impetuous errors of youth. Thereupon, turning my eyes back to Elizabeth's father, I perceived, so far as I was able to judge from his composed features, that evidently he was convinced of my mistake. This was no time to arraign the envoy for high crimes; that were folly — his alibi was too perfect. Well, why not carry out the farce until a more favorable wind blew?

"A mistake it seems," I agreed with simulated thoughtfulness. Then, with an inspiration, "How about appropriating my paper, Señor?"

"Ah, that! It is a map of one of my country's forts — Venezuela's fort. I must beg of you to give it to me."

The sly fox! My inspiration had given him a chance, and the audacity of his move held me for a moment speechless.

"What is this, Charles?" Mr. Moore asked quickly. "A map — what map and what fort?"

"I have a paper in my pocket which the Señor sought to take from me. Indeed, he did take it from me. Is it likely that I should have any of Venezuela's plans of fortification on my person? It's another case of 'mistaken identity' and this time on the part

of Señor D'Ur—Hervalle. 'Mistaken identity' seems to be contagious in Moore House to-night."

Mr. Moore was too adept in this particular business of veiled talk not to read an underlying meaning. He gazed at me sharply, glanced once at D'Urville, once at Davis, then remarked:

"You have a map?"

"Yes, a map."

"Of a fortification?"

I paused. "That I must decline to answer."

"Then it would be useless to inquire if I might see it?"

"I fear so, Mr. Moore."

"Or ask how you obtained it?"

"For the present at least, while so much mistaken identity exists. My explanations would sound unconvincing."

"Very remarkable, this occurrence." And he took a pace or two back and forth.

I now had time to regard the others, who at this time were more on-lookers than participants in the scene. Davis stood on one side expressionless, save for his eyes; farther back was the servant who had done his duty so well in seizing me; on one side by a hall-tree, Elizabeth and her friend listened with large eyes. The latter was a brown-haired girl of about Elizabeth's size, pretty, with a vivacious expression upon her face, now emphasized by intense interest. Fat little D'Urville continued benevolent, slightly thoughtful, guileless. I gingerly rubbed my

scratched cheek and considered; unlike the fisherman of the Arabian tale, I had not succeeded in persuading the genie back into the jar and he had escaped abroad; in other words, the map was playing the deuce!

It may seem strange that, focused as were all our minds on this paper, I presently became occupied with consideration of another subject to the exclusion of the other. This was Betty. The suggestion came creeping into a cell somewhere in my brain to take note how she considered my presence, nay, to be accurate, my performance; for my precipitation into Moore House so soon after her cold dismissal of the afternoon could not be without effect upon her. However she was not looking in my direction; she was gazing intently at her father's chief guest, a little wrinkle creasing her white forehead, gazing with an intentness as much of mind as of look, and I idly wondered what could be the cause. Her fair companion murmured an aside to her, but Elizabeth did not answer, nor was a repetition better favored. Clearly something deeply engaged her.

Then Mr. Moore finished his pacing.

"We're certain of the following facts," he said, "which brush away the confusion. Mr. Davis mistook you for a burglar."

"Quite true; for a spy, in fact."

"And you mistook Señor Del Hervalle for a sort of polite highwayman."

"That's a natural construction to put on his act."

"Señor believed you held a paper inimical to Venezuela."

"Possibly he believes so yet." And I looked at my little controversialist.

D'Urville spread his hands in an eloquent gesture which might have meant nothing, which might have meant anything.

"If you'll assure him that it's not a map of a Venezuelan fortress—" Mr. Moore suggested, pausing.

"I think I can so assure him."

"Though of some fortress, in fact," he continued dryly.

I bit my lip. He had trapped me neatly, and that piece of fat was in the fire.

"Though of some fortress, yes."

"Your word will be sufficient, I'm confident."

"Then he has it."

Instantly a smile illuminated the Frenchman's face; his moustache points rose beatifically. He placed a hand upon his breast and bowed.

"It is of great sufficiency, Señor — Señor — The honor of your name I have not yet."

"Woodworth — one easily forgotten."

"So the whole matter, with exception" — Mr. Moore regarded me shrewdly — "of how you happen to be possessed of a map of a fortress, is cleared up."

"Oh, as for the map," said I lightly, "I obtained

it as spoils of war. But that would not interest you." And I turned away as if the subject were concluded.

"As you have also obtained spoils of grass and good rich soil. Let us hope the one may prove no more serious than the other."

In pursuing the controversy it was true I had forgotten what sort of appearance I made; therefore stating that I would return home and call another time when I was more presentable, and Mr. Moore and his party accepting my apologies, I withdrew. Outside the door I was accosted by the servant who had aided in my capture.

"I'm sorry, sir, I was mixed up in an attack on you, Mr. Woodworth," he said.

"No harm done."

"I really supposed you a spy."

"My position might have led to that belief."

He hesitated, looked over his shoulder, then addressed me in a lowered voice.

"Funny thing, sir, about that map."

I looked at him. "What do you mean?"

He jerked his thumb towards the drawing-room door, then slowly winked. "Him."

"Señor Del Hervalle?" I was still mystified. "Explain."

"Why, he spoke your name while I held your hands, then afterwards said he did n't know you."

This time it was I who winked, also I put something substantial in his hand and bade him preserve silence.

I was entirely correct when I judged that D'Urville would not long delay making another move in the game. He was prompt, but as I might have anticipated in dealing with such a man it was exactly the step I had not expected. By nature he should have attempted a hidden stroke; imagine then my surprise when next morning, with the sunlight over all the island and sea, he came walking briskly up the path to the veranda where I sat. His manner was businesslike. I rose to greet him.

"You'll permit me to visit you?" he inquired suavely.

"By all means — in daylight."

I placed a chair for him, which he accepted graciously.

"Your view over the water is charming, Señor."

"It is, without question."

"And I suppose you enjoy it."

"Very much. But surely you did not do me the honor to call merely for a discussion of scenery."

He twisted a point of his moustache and turned to me smiling.

"The last time we met — let me see," he began.

"Was it not on a steamer gangway in New York? You were in a great hurry to get ashore."

"While you were in a great hurry to get aboard. Time has treated you well. Your fortunes were rather obscure then, Monsieur D'Urville —"

"Señor Del Hervalle, I pray you," he interrupted calmly, at the same time lifting a hand in protest.

"Monsieur D'Urville does not exist, if indeed such a gentleman ever existed—a mechanic, I believe you said last evening. Bah, what have we to do with artisans! I know nothing of them or of this D'Urville, and I am sure that you, my friend, remember nothing of such a man. And now, Señor Woodworth, the occasion of my visit is to discuss with you the disposition of the map which you now hold."

"Well, it really needs little discussion," I said, "seeing that it's mine."

"You are impetuous, hasty, Señor Woodworth."

He moved the tails of his coat upon his knees, folding his hands upon his walking stick, and looked at me inquiringly.

"What do you propose?" I asked.

"Concerted action. I am in a position of influence and have many sources of knowledge. I will advise you where to dispose of it."

"What fortress is it the map of?"

"Ah, Señor, that I must not say. You have the map, but without its name it is worthless; I have the name, but without the map am helpless. We must, as I say, combine our forces to place the map where it will prove the most effective."

"As well as lucrative?" I smiled.

"The secret war constantly going on between nations, my young friend, allows many things to be done which would be discreditable in private life," he remarked. "What we would never do in a per-



sonal capacity, as between one man and another, is in international affairs legitimate. It is part of the preparedness for war. We therefore will be acting only the part of patriots, assisting our noble countries inasmuch as we weaken a rival."

I smiled at this sophistry. "Then the noble part would be for me to deliver this to my government at once. I will do so."

"No." His hand was again lifted to stop me. "That would be a hasty error. Here we have a map of a European fortress, shall we say? In European affairs the United States is neutral, has little concern. But what of Europe itself? Ah, Señor Woodworth, we must play a stroke of policy—you to assist in secret your splendid republic, I to deal a wound to those selfish nations who already have sought to crush my good friend, *El Presidente*, and seize his customs. No, no, we will dispose of it in a quarter where it will accomplish much, and since this is a practical age we shall personally benefit by the patriotic transaction. Entrust to me negotiations."

"You're built for such, I'm sure."

"And the map."

"Now it is you who are in haste, Señor Del Hervalle. Your action of last night is still fresh in mind, and I tell you frankly that I have no idea of selling the map or going into partnership with you. I really don't trust you, you know," I remarked pleasantly, while looking him in the eyes.

"Your record while brilliant is not exactly inspiring, even allowing for its success. You know you might run off with the map. Your diplomacy even compasses treachery. Take, for instance, your little affair with Lonagan, the gun-runner."

There was a slight narrowing of his eyes. But if I thought to startle him out of his placid composure, I undershot the mark. He continued to smile upon me, his hands resting upon his walking stick.

"Lonagan — a contemptible trader," he said. "But I perceive, Señor Woodworth, that our views are yet some distance apart and that we shall have to confer from time to time until this matter is agreed upon."

"I fear that it will be useless."

"There again you are impetuous. Diplomacy can arrange all matters, and we will be diplomatic." He took up his hat and rose. "Let me suggest you keep close watch upon the map."

"Never fear as to that."

"Do not let it pass from your possession."

"I will not, I can assure you."

"Even to go from the island."

Now I looked at him closely. His voice had grown a trifle more insistent. Was this a veiled threat? Was he warning me not to attempt to take the map from out of his reach?

"You are favored with visitors," he said presently.

Sure enough, up the path came my German. He

moved leisurely, swinging his stick. At the step of the veranda he lifted his hat politely, then mounted.

"If your business is finished, Mr. Woodworth, I desire to continue our discussion of a certain subject."

"I can't do that until I am apprised of whom I'm receiving."

He drew forth a card-case and extracting a card handed it to me. I examined it. The humor of the situation was too keen to be ignored, and so I turned to the Frenchman.

"Señor Del Hervalle, allow me to present to you Baron Adolph Von Hussman — Baron, Señor Del Hervalle, special envoy from Venezuela."

The pair bowed. Del Hervalle's face beamed welcome and courtesy; the Baron's countenance was polite and expressionless. Then I could not resist adding:

"You two should meet, as you both appear interested in a certain document which I possess."

"Baron, we shall be great friends," Señor Del Hervalle exclaimed delightfully.

"The interests of Germany and Venezuela — and France, shall I say? — can never move except in harmony."

Such good-will was deserving of honor.

"We'll drink a cup of wine," I said. "Andrew, glasses and the tankard of sherry."

## CHAPTER VI

### THE VARIOUS VISITS OF SEÑOR DEL HERVALLE

The Frenchman had, after a courteous interval, bowed himself away, and the Baron occupied the place of my previous visitor. We had talked for some time, but now sat silent, gazing out upon the ocean while I awaited his further pleasure. His straw hat and stick were held in one hand, with the other he from time to time gave a thoughtful upward twist to his Kaiser-like moustache. I had occasion to examine him more carefully; he was not far from forty, one side or the other of that age, and a man in his prime; the square set of his shoulders bespoke military training, and both his bearing and manner showed that he was a man accustomed to dealing with large affairs; his face was impassive, but no self-repression could hide what his jaw indicated, determination to stubbornness. Well, I had already had the evidence of his perseverance.

Clearly he found the situation perplexing, found me an anomaly in that class of gentlemen common on the Continent who live by the use of their wits and by sale of such secrets as nations are willing to trade in. The presence of Del Hervalles confirmed him in his early suspicion — and this was just be-

"I can't bargain, I regret to state."

"Ah!"

The exclamation was full of meaning; his obvious conclusion was that I had already progressed so far with Del Hervalle that I could not open negotiations in a new direction.

"I've not as yet come to any agreement with any one, particularly with my late visitor," I said dryly. "Would you like to see the map?"

He shot a surprised look at me, but answered without eagerness, "Certainly, as you know."

"There's one condition."

"Condition?"

"Your word will satisfy me perfectly, Baron."

He looked at me, took a puff at his cigarette, and then gazed out on the water.

"Name the condition," he said finally.

"If I show you this map, I must have your word that you will make no further effort to see it or to obtain it, and that you will go away from the island. In turn, I'll give you assurance that the map in no way shall be used to the detriment of your country."

"That is an impossible demand."

"It's a fair one."

"I fear, Mr. Woodworth, that after all you're inexperienced in this sort of business—or is it merely a bold stroke?"

"Inexperience, no doubt."

He laughed quietly. "I can't give you my word

as you request and I can't credit any assurance you 'll give me. Besides, my country would hold me culpable if I entered into any such agreement which left a map of one of her fortresses in the hands of a possible enemy."

"Then I regret that your longing to see it must remain unsatisfied."

He gathered his stick and hat to go.

"I must take my departure. I do not think you're an ordinary mercenary spy," stated he, "and you're young. Therefore I give you fair warning that I feel at liberty to use whatever means I think best to recover the map. Before resorting to final measures, I came here to put the matter to you a last time."

"I can't accommodate you, Baron."

"Then I'll bid you good morning."

I rose, laying a hand on his arm.

"Come, come, Baron, don't rush off. No doubt you find the village inn difficult and I've a good cook here in the person of my servant Andrew. You can hear him clatter dishes now; remain and we shall eat here on the veranda. You also undoubtedly grow weary for company; let us declare neutrality for a time and enjoy luncheon together, temporarily dismiss the subject of the map, and enjoy ourselves."

At this he made no effort to conceal his surprise. For a time he remained silent, then a smile gradually broke over his face, his blue eyes

shone, while he put down his hat to extend his hand.

"You Americans are irresistible. Even if you betray me afterwards to France, I'll stay to lunch with you."

"I'm not such a rogue as you suspect, Baron, and now for a glass from the tankard. It holds something we both want."

"One thing I'm sure, at least, it's not Dutch courage, Woodworth."

Neither of us again made reference to the map, confining ourselves to general topics. The Baron proved an agreeable companion; he had traveled much and during the meal regaled me with several of his adventures in East Africa, Brazil, and Turkey. Of his business in America, or for that matter of his business anywhere, I never so much as got an inkling; he dexterously steered away from that reef, leaving me to infer he was a gentleman of means and leisure. But one thing struck me as noteworthy — the countries of which he spoke and where he had traveled were those particular quarters of the world where Germany had secured or was at present endeavoring to create a "sphere of influence." Was he an agent of his government? If so, what was he doing in America? Those were questions on which I could only speculate.

When he made ready to return to the village, I decided to accompany him. Exercise I needed, for I had not left the Lodge that morning. We strolled

along the beach, and he pointed now to a sea-shell, now to a bunch of sea-weed, describing and giving the scientific name of each with an ease born of that exact and unremitting study which characterizes the German system of schools. He was the type of purposeful men produced by the Empire who perceiving the crowded condition of their country had set themselves resolutely to the task of establishing colonies and of placing Germany in the front rank of maritime nations. As accurately as he spoke of a floating sea-urchin, so had he reviewed the conditions of Turkey and Africa where he had traveled. And now here he was stopping in this little village of Lavouche fully resolved to obtain the map which I held. Chance had shown him it; he would not depart so long as there was a possibility of gaining it. I experienced a premonition of coming trouble, for he was of the superior type of foemen, the kind of man who leads, who rises to any emergency, who does not take defeat for an answer. Del Hervalles alone was enough under ordinary circumstances to furnish me sufficient occupation; now to have the Baron planning an assault from a still different direction made the future look dubious.

In the inn the Baron left me to go to his room to write letters. Therefore I pulled up a chair close to the window where madame was knitting. But conversation was even more difficult with her than usual, so lighting my pipe I gave myself up to thought.



My mind reverted to the Baron, from whom I had just parted, for just what he would initiate in the way of action I was at a loss to anticipate. To be sure, he worked under a disadvantage; he was an alien in Lavouche, without friends, without assistants, and with his purpose known to me, while on the other hand I was, so to speak, in my home. He would hardly dare resort to force unless all else failed and he became desperate, and then it would be only such physical measures as were necessary temporarily to overcome me. He was not a professional thug; my life would not be in danger. Ransack my house he might, take the paper by rascality he might, if he could lay hands upon it; yet neither of these things was in the nature of the man, and something indefinite, intangible, character-inferred, convinced me that when he acted it would be along another line. Such means were too petty, too uncertain, for a man of his stamp. In harmony with the iron system which pervaded and ruled his country and moulded on hard broad lines the thought of her people, whatever plan he put into operation would be worthy of his training, complete, prepared, machine-like, executed with the precision of an army movement. Altogether a different man was he from Del Hervalle, altogether different would be his operation. From the Frenchman I could expect a treacherous attack, a blow in the dark, struck where I seemed to stand in greatest safety and when no foe seemed near; such had always been the

man's way and in a measure I could make preparation. How Von Hussman would go about his work I knew not and in consequence was at a loss where to expect his move.

"Madame," said I to the inn-woman, "how do you like your guest?"

"Any guest is well liked who pays well."

"He pays well, then?"

"The score, and something over." Her needles clicked away, and the yarn twitched in the stocking.

"Such a guest may stay forever."

"He's well behaved?" I continued.

"Yes."

"He does n't guzzle with Pilon and the others, nor kick over the table, nor split his throat shouting into others' ears, nor —"

"Monsieur," she interrupted shortly, "you jest."

"A baron could not of course do such things."

For one minute she ceased knitting.

"Oh, a baron!"

"Your roof is honored to that extent."

An hour passed while I exchanged light talk or indulged in reflection which yielded no particular result. I rose, yawning, and stood in the door. Should I return home? In the idle fashion which one employs when in a state of indecision or indolence, I glanced at the sky, at the cliff which walled the upper end of the village, at the doors opposite, at the lower end of the street; none of these afforded inspiration. Then I paused. Was not that Del

Hervalle's plump little figure which had just rounded the corner of Gaspard's boat-shop and which now was coming briskly forward? Under any circumstances the movements of the Frenchman would have interested me; at this time when I was expecting some line of action pointing towards recovery of the map I was more than interested — I was eager. So I drew back into the inn, where remaining in the shadow of the door I awaited his approach in order to determine on what special mission he was now engaged. Nothing which he did was idle; everything was directed to an end. Presently his footsteps sounded on the rocky pavement of the street; he swung by the inn without pause. I put an eye about the lintel and saw his plump figure halt before the next door, where casting a sharp look about he entered.

"I think it's that noisy fellow Pilon who lives beside you, is n't it?" I inquired of madame. She nodded and continued her knitting.

What had the Frenchman in common with his rough compatriot? Where had they made acquaintance and what was the occasion of this visit? I stepped into the street and advanced until I stood before the house into which the man had entered.

The door stood ajar. I drew near and listened; no sound came from within. Retreating a few paces, I surveyed the face of the structure to observe if I were watched, but no eye was at window. There was little to distinguish the house from its neigh-

bor on either side, or indeed from any of the dwellings along the street; the inn flanked it on the left, the house which contained Martin Dellar's merchandise store on the right, and its chief distinguishing feature was the dilapidated roof sagging slightly inward from age and want of repair. It had stood empty for some time, ever since Mosette, its owner, had died, and until the three vagabond French sailors took possession. A window stood in the wall beside the door; in the story above, a pair of them; and finally at the top two dormer windows projected from the roof. In other respects the wall was blank, except for a pattern of panels built in wood over the higher half.

Adventure was on me. I looked up the street and down, then finally at the windows again; nothing was to be seen, the house was still. With a light step I reached the door and entered. The square room was empty. Casting a rapid glance about, at the cold fireplace, at the furniture which comprised only a table and stools, and at the litter of crusts, burnt matches, and empty wine flasks strewn over the floor (Pilon and his companions lived not tidily) and at the stone staircase rising along the wall, I stole to the door of the inner room, which I found empty.

I returned to the stair. Apparently the three sailors dwelt on the floor above, and thither Del Hervalles had taken himself straight as one who was a familiar acquaintance. Listen as I would, I could

distinguish no sounds which indicated the presence of human occupants. To seek higher would be the height of imprudence, but I itched to go upward; the steps were stone, there would be no creak to betray me. Noise of a door opening above saved me from this folly just at the instant when I had cast fear to the winds and placed foot on the first step. Now I could hear voices; Del Hervalle speaking in rapid incisive tones, Pilon's heavy notes answering; and they were approaching to descend. Risking myself no further, I moved silently to the door, stepped into the street, and regained the shelter of the inn-room. My little expedition had produced nothing except to ascertain that Mr. Moore's chief guest was on terms of intimacy with Lavouche's first ruffian, certainly a relationship of which no good could come.

Apparently Pilon did not leave his house, for when Del Hervalle's figure darkened the tavern door in entering he was alone. I bent over the table at which I sat, simulating study of an old newspaper.

"A good afternoon, madame," he greeted pleasantly. "You knit an endless stocking. Behold, is that you, Señor Charles?"

I lifted my head. "Oh, good day, señor." I folded the sheet. "You're touring our little village."

"Yes, yes. How like France! It is unusual, unique, a preserved antique in a modern setting. Are you making your way home?"

"Not yet, monsieur — or señor — which is it?"

He smiled, beaming. "What a joker! And you are not joining me?"

"Well, no, my house is dull."

"We must liven it," said he. "I compliment you, madame, upon your industry. Heaven will some day give you a great reward."

"Heaven knows nothing of stockings," answered madame.

"We're taught that Heaven knows everything," Del Hervalles replied. "Not so, my young friend Charles?"

"Truly, señor, but you have meditated the fact carefully?"

"Often, often, but there is the consolation, so great, so satisfying," he spread his hands in one of his expressive gestures, "that Heaven never speaks what it knows." He cast his eyes upward, then let them fall easily. "You're not then joining me?"

This was the third time he had asked the question.

"No, señor," I replied.

After he had gone, I recalled the peculiar insistence of his inquiry. Was there any particular reason why he pressed the question? Would he dare —

I sprang up. Surely he would not attempt such a move. But a strange uneasiness pervaded me. I walked to the door, where staring down the street I observed him walking in no great haste, swinging

his walking stick as if his mind were entirely free from thought; and I returned to the table. But the old journal was not read by me, though I gazed at it intently for five minutes. I could not shake off my cloak of apprehension; the recollection of his tone when last he asked me if I were joining him, the actual though faint hint of eagerness which I recalled in the question, came again and again to impinge upon my mind, until at last I stood up decided in my intention. I would take no risks, I would make sure, I would go home.

Turning off from the beach where the bluff ended in a slope, I pursued through the wood the road which he must have taken to reach Moore House. Ahead of me I saw nothing of him, but that was to be expected since he had sufficient start to reach his destination before I came in eye-shot. Then as I paused at the path which ran southward from the road to my house, I beheld coming towards me Mr. Moore's servant who had assisted at my capture the previous night.

"Is Señor Del Hervalle at home?" I inquired.

"No, Mr. Woodworth. He went out an hour ago and has n't yet returned."

"In the village, I suppose?" I asked.

"Probably, sir."

"What is your name?" I asked.

"Stevens, sir."

"Well, Stevens, you've caught no more burglars, have you?"

"Not yet, sir," he grinned.

"Keep an eye open."

"I will, Mr. Woodworth." He regarded me as if to speak further.

"What is it, Stevens?"

"Well, sir, if it does n't seem presumptuous, I wished to say that Miss Betty had me on one side and asked me all about the affair last night."

"And you told her?"

"I could n't very well avoid it, sir; generally I can lie as comfortably as the next, but when her blue eyes are on me I can't tell anything but the truth."

"Then she knows Señor Del Hervalles recognized me?"

"Yes, sir."

I considered a moment. "It really does n't matter."

"The curious fact was, sir, she too ordered me to say nothing about it, as you had done."

Did Betty suspect her guest? That would truly add excitement to the situation. A pair of sharp eyes were in her head, and if her suspicions were once aroused she would use them. Well, those eyes might prove of valuable assistance.

It did not take me long to reach home. Asking myself if the Frenchman believing he might make a search in my absence had ventured here, I made my way over the turf of the lawn and around the front of the Lodge.



My mental intimations had been right! I heard his voice addressing my servant.

"He is attempting to cajole Andrew into giving up the map," I surmised.

That, as I discovered when I came in line with a window of the long room, was putting the case mildly. Cajole it might have been, if such an expression may be used to describe the action of one man backing another against a wall at the point of a pistol. Thus Del Hervalle besieged Andrew.

"You must tell me where is the map, my man," the Frenchman was saying smoothly, "or this pistol will go off."

Andrew was frightened. His usually ruddy cheeks were colorless; it may have been imagination on my part, but it seemed as if his fluffy white hair stiffened and sought to stand on end. Back to the wall, hands raised above his head, he trembled violently.

"You may shoot me, sir," he quavered, "but I will never betray Master Charles."

"Would you let a paper stand between you and death?"

My servant moistened his lips and opened them twice before any sound issued.

"Yes, sir. I served his grandfather and his father and now Master Charles. I will not betray his secret. I am an old man who is not afraid to die."

Good old Andrew! He would be loyal even unto death — and if he died, there would be another die

also in the person of Del Hervalles. I had slipped off my foot gear; so, carrying my shoes in one hand and revolver cocked in the other, I crept to the door. Andrew, who might have seen me, was however too fascinated by the muzzle of the weapon before his eyes; the Frenchman was unaware of my presence, for his fat smooth back was towards me. I drew a bead at the spot where his heart — if he had one, though I doubted it — should be; my finger was just closing on the trigger, when he stepped back, lowering his own weapon and uttering an exclamation of disappointment.

“You’re not yet dead, my man,” said he. “I see you’re one of those foolish fellows who would really die for an absurd idea of duty.”

“I would die, sir, for Master Charles.”

“Eh, so. Now get me a glass of wine. Though you have annoyed me, I shall be generous. I will spare you.”

Andrew was not yet done.

“Sir, I only serve wine to Master Charles’ friends.”

“Quite right, Andrew,” I said, entering the room, “and, Señor Del Hervalles, I’ll be obliged if you will place that pistol on the table. No tricks, if you please — I have you covered.”

The Frenchman did as I ordered, while a little smile played upon his lips.

“I perceive that you decided to come home after all,” he said.

"Yes, and I find the house not so dull as I thought. Help the gentleman to some wine, Andrew, as he requests; he appears fond of the flavor." And taking a step, I pocketed his pistol.

Señor Del Hervalle accepted the glass of sherry, sipped it, and held it to the light.

"It is excellent," he announced.

## CHAPTER VII

### STRATEGY INTRODUCED UPON AN ISLAND

Two days passed without particular event. I idled about the Lodge, I spent an hour each afternoon at Moore House and once took Muriel Nesbit for a sail. Her conversation was always amusing and original, and it was doubly so when she rode between the two perils of sunburn and what she not being used to water conceived to be exhilarating adventure. Her speech finally came round to Davis.

"He moves like a tongueless creature," she declared, "and makes me shudder. And once—I pledge you to secrecy!—he tried to make love to me and once to Betty, but in such a way that we could n't take offense. Betty and I compare notes, you know."

"Always?" I inquired.

"Even about you, but you don't do much that's interesting."

"I'll improve at once," and I laid my hand over hers.

She snatched it away.

"Charles Woodworth, when I have love made to me I want it in dead earnest—and you are head

over heels in love with Betty. If you want to practice on me — Oh! that wave will drown us! — as a sort of understudy in preparation for the address you shall make to Betty, I'll oblige you. I'll let my fingers trail in the water, like the sentimental ladies in pictures, only there are no swans about, and cast my eyes down mournfully — ” She uttered a suppressed scream, then said angrily, “ How dare you! You turned the tiller purposely and wet my sleeve to the elbow.”

“ I could n't help it, I really could n't,” I said, “ your acting distracted me.”

“ Then we'll have no more of it. You're not to be trusted. As I was saying — My, what a slap that wave gave! Mr. Davis makes me shudder. He says he's an American, but I don't believe it. He speaks half a dozen languages, all fluently, and there's something about him that is foreign. He's not an American, I'll bet a dollar,” she continued slangily; “ then he always keeps his eyes on one until one grows uncomfortable.”

“ If he annoys you or Betty, I'll take him in hand.”

“ Be careful; he hates you, I know it.”

“ Perhaps he has reason to,” I grinned, remembering the fright which I had given him.

“ When your name is mentioned, his eyes grow positively ugly.”

“ Well, I don't think I've anything to fear. And as I said, I'll see that he does n't annoy you.”

The occasion arose that very afternoon to put into effect my championship. We had landed and were ascending the path, when my companion darted forward to a copse which stood on the turf to gather a cluster of bluebells. The clump of bushes was small, perhaps ten feet across, and as I followed her we were both immediately apprised by voices engaged in conversation of the presence of others not visible.

"You treat me with scant regard," said one, which I recognized as Davis's.

It was Betty who answered. "You can find no fault with the treatment you have received as a guest at Moore House."

"No, no. But it is something more than that I want. Perhaps because I am only Señor Del Hervalle's secretary, I should preserve silence. Yet I cannot. You have given me encouragement to believe —"

"Mr. Davis!"

"It is true, or I would not now presume to make any advances. We need not let others know; see, you are interested. I know you are above the littleness of conventions. You are a woman of experience."

At this point I marched around the bush. Like a true comrade, Muriel followed at my heels — "to see the fun," as she afterwards expressed it.

"You've said too much, Mr. Davis, and I don't like your insinuations as to this lady's disposition,"

I stated sternly. "Let this be the last time you speak to her except on common topics."

He drew back a step. The natural pallor of his cheek increased until it resembled marble, but there was a venomous light in his eyes.

"By what right —" he began.

Betty interrupted him with a wave of her hand.

"Leave this to me, Mr. Davis," she said. Then turning, "You're taking a great deal upon yourself, Mr. Woodworth, to intrude here without my express invitation. What Mr. Davis says, or does n't say, concerns you not the least in the world." And her eyes flashed many lightnings.

"I think it does," I answered.

"Pray how?"

"Well, for one reason because I'm going to marry you shortly."

She stared; then a look of scorn grew on her face.

"Indeed! Kindly state that again. You're going to what?"

"Exactly what I said — marry you. You may not be perfectly aware of it as yet, but such is the case. Therefore I give this gentleman due warning that I'll administer such punishment as I think necessary if I discover him making any more impertinent proposals." I stepped forward. "We'll return to the house." And taking her hand and placing it upon my arm, I started up the slope.

She did not resist; she moved by my side as in

a dream, until we reached the portico. Then she whirled upon me with eyes burning like hot sapphires. "I hate you, hate you!" she exclaimed in a fury of passion. "You are contemptible! I shall listen to Mr. Davis whenever I please — and I shall please very often! I never want to speak to you again, or see you! If you dare to molest me in the future, I — I — Oh, how I hate you!"

"Betty," I replied quietly, "that fellow's a scoundrel."

"Stop!"

"No, I've not finished and you must listen. He is a slinking scoundrel, and if he ever insults you again by veiled allusions I'll break every bone in his body. I need not tell you I love you — you know it and have known it for years."

Her eyes still blazed. Her whole lovely person was afire with anger and she gripped her palms until her hands were white.

"Never set foot here again, Charles Woodworth."

"I'll have to, for I'm going to marry you."

"Marry me!" she choked. "I'd sooner marry — marry Andrew!" with which she turned and vanished in the house.

I gazed at the door. The course which I had planned to follow, the policy of determined force, had at its first trial produced unexpected, not to say, explosive results. Betty was very lovely in a rage; but chance of winning her seemed to be exceedingly remote, to twinkle afar off and grow more and more



dim like a receding star. Try as I would, I could not somehow hit on the right road to her affections.

A voice whispered at my shoulder :

"That was grand! Like the third act of a play!"

I turned about and found Muriel, face aglow with excitement. "And how you did put down that man Davis! There he goes stealing around the house. Charles Woodworth, I'll fall in love with you myself; if Betty does n't want you, I'll take you."

"She does n't want me."

"She does n't know whether she does or not."

"Her remarks were very positive on the subject."

"Positive perhaps, but not final—a woman's never are." With which sage bit of philosophy she nodded brightly and passed within the house.

"This has been a deuce of an afternoon. I'll go down and see if Jean is at home," I thought. "He's an anchor in any storm."

So off I set along the road to Lavouche, pondering over all that had happened since I came to the island. If I had sought a change from the steady, uneventful life of my past year and a half, I could not in any spot on earth have more quickly found it. Quiet old Lavouche, what with the map and what with Betty, promised to keep me occupied to the utmost.

Chance threw me in the way of old Gaspard, the boat-maker. Where the road debouched from the wood upon the sands, a hundred yards south of the village, his garden was situated with an

afternoon exposure, a patch of rich black soil perhaps fifty feet square. The little old fellow, who had been bending over some potato vines, concluded his inspection and hailed me shrilly.

"Aha, Charles, what is this I hear of you?" he cried.

"I can never guess, Gaspard."

"Come sit on this log," he answered, pointing to a fallen tree, "and I will tell you the report certain evil persons are spreading about."

Nothing more was needed to enlist my interest; and Gaspard, if anybody in Lavouche, knew what was being gossiped and what contrived in the village. He folded his spectacles and began his story.

It appeared that the three vagabond sailors, Pilon, Descarte, and Esper, had been talking loudly in the inn over their wine and into the ears of any one who would listen, talking that I was in possession of one of beloved France's maps, a secret map of one of her fortresses located somewhere on the eastern boundary, and was attempting to dispose of it to her enemy, Germany. No one believed the fellows, they were such braggarts and liars, and besides it was well known that Pilon had no liking for me; but nevertheless (Gaspard continued) I was acquainted with how people would listen to any idle gossip. Therefore it would be well to go to the village and deny that I had any such map, or any map at all. All yesterday afternoon and all the previous evening the scamps had talked of it in-

cessantly. Jean had at last lifted his fist against Pilon and threatened to crack his head, then they were silent for a while, but only until Jean had gone away. Pilon himself had visited half a dozen houses to tell the tale — Jerome the merchant's, Surçon the mayor's, who was also the oldest fisherman, yes, and others, even to Gaspard himself. Truly it was necessary to prove Pilon a liar by going to the village and proclaiming that I had no map.

"Good Gaspard," I rejoined, "I have no map of any of France's forts, but it does happen that I have a map."

The old man rubbed his nose and eyed me in astonishment.

"How comes it, Charles, that a simple young man like you should have such a paper?"

"Oh, by accident entirely. It's too long a tale, but I can assure you that I have n't the least intention in the world of harming France. I have none of her maps."

"Your word is sufficient; it will end these fellows' babble."

It was easy to ascribe to Pilon the source of his knowledge and the inspirer of his tale. Señor Del Hervalle had not made his visit to the house adjoining the inn without a purpose which now transpired; he sought to disarm me of the friendship and support of the village, so that when he should be ready to measure swords with me I must stand alone.

Gaspard however would explain that I had nothing to do with France, either for or against her, and since the fisherman of Lavouche had known both my father and me, that would be sufficient to counteract the insidious attack.

But in this regard the old man and I were mistaken in our easy opinion. Gaspard went immediately to the village and set himself industriously to work to counteract the tale — a task his heart was in, as he had a full subject for talk, which was like wine to him, and had in addition a sharp contempt for Pilon and his crew. Indeed, I should have known better than to permit him thus to venture forth in my defense. His explanation was only a half explanation; it but whetted curiosity the sharper. Tongues wagged, voices chattered, old heads nodded, young ones doubted, questions flew. There was the map! If not one of France's forts, whose? How had I got it, and what would I do with it? Since I had told Gaspard so much, why not more? It was very strange, this map. And was there not also an unknown visitor in Lavouche, a man who had been loitering some days? What was he doing here? He had been seen to go to my house; he was a German, an enemy of France. What should I have to do with him, *mon Dieu*, yes, more particularly when I had a map? If it were a harmless map, why did I not bring it to the village and show it to people? Sons did not always turn out as honest as their fathers, no, not always.

No doubt in the beginning there was with most of them no intention to injure me; the good folk liked argument and subjects were not common; curiosity was at the bottom of it. But the harm lay in continued talk. The oftener the topic was broached, the more curious the people grew, and from curiosity to doubt, from doubt to suspicion, is an easy road. And at last overwhelmed by a hail of questions old Gaspard could not make any answer; he was scoffed at for carrying only half a story, and angry, baffled, stammering imprecations upon Lavouche for its stupidity and malice, he returned to his house and locked the door against some of the young fellows who, admiring and imitating Pilon's rough jests, followed him with jibes.

All this I learned from Andrew, who had gone marketing to the village and came in for his share of attention. They had not got anything out of him, not out of Andrew; but he had perceived what was going on up and down the streets and at doors, and he had lingered so as to bring me a full account. There had been no threats against me except by Pilon; indeed the older and wiser heads had said, "Patience, patience, the matter will come out!" But the village was nevertheless wrought into excitement, and there were murmurings against the stranger, the German, who stopped at the inn and who apparently had no business except with me.

This was a new turn of affairs that made me pause. Del Hervalle had struck, struck as was his manner from ambush. He appeared nowhere in it and yet it was his blow. Still I did not look for trouble from the village, as they were peaceable men; but my situation might nevertheless be made uncomfortable. Sentiment for the country from which their ancestors had come was yet strong in their breasts; they retained its speech and customs; in all save dwelling-place they were still French; and to assail the country across the sea was in a way to assail them. They would expect this matter to be made straight. Cunning Del Hervalle! He had seized the one point of weakness in my position and made it an advantage to himself. In Pilon he had found a ready and handy tool, exactly the one needed for his purpose, a fellow not troubled with scruples, sufficiently bold and rough and, what was more, already hating me. What should I do? The village would be none the wiser if I spread the map before its eyes, while on the other hand to say that I did not know what fortress it represented would only be adding fuel to the fire. Yes, cunning Del Hervalle, he had tied my hands and tongue.

Then a graver doubt entered my mind. The little Frenchman's plots were never simple; on the contrary, they were generally complex. Had he a deeper motive under all this than merely that of securing the map? To be sure, the latter would be

valuable in his hands and he would not lightly abandon his effort to obtain it; but was he laying the foundation of a more sinister scheme? My presence threatened his security, my knowledge of his past was too dangerous to allow him to rest in peace, even though it seemed I could make no use of it, for some turn of the wheel, some veering of the wind of fortune, might give me the necessary advantage. Other witnesses to his guilty work at Forge were alive, Maitland, Ethys, Mr. Fenton, and with these to support my accusations, and with the influence which Mr. Fenton, a power in New York, a man respected in Washington, could wield, Señor Del Hervalle as a distinguished envoy and a gentleman of honorable position would be unmasked before the world and ruined in his usefulness to Castro. I sat up gripping the arm of my chair. As D'Urville at Forge, my antagonist had not halted at half-measures; as Del Hervalle at Lavouche, would he be any the more likely to do so? Did he plot to forestall me, to render me helpless before I could act, to condemn me in the sight of Lavouche, to end my friendship with the Moores and thus make any accusations which I should bring against him futile because of my own apparent double-dealing and treachery? Would he entangle me in disgrace!

With the realization that I alone could not bring him to justice I sat down and wrote Jack Maitland the full particulars of what had happened and what

I suspected for the future. If I knew anything of Jack, or of Mr. Fenton either, they were men who would not let business stand in their way of coming to Lavouche. They were fighters. And the score of D'Urville's crimes at Forge was not yet paid! It was with a comforting sense of satisfaction, of provision for the morrow, that I signed and sealed my narrative. The demand for their presence I had made strong, stronger because of D'Urville's probable future claim of immunity on the ground of being a special ambassador. Under such a cloak he could hope to contrive and plot and act unchecked; any assault upon him would become an international affair. Single-handed I was helpless, so I urged haste, haste; D'Urville could be quick — therefore haste was imperative.

The letter I locked in a drawer. I would entrust it to Jean, loyal Jean, who should carry it with his own hand to the railroad station and with his own hand place it abroad a train. A wire dispatched at the same time would give Jack warning of the letter's coming. Thus I laid my plans. I even wrote out the telegram:

D'Urville is here with Moore as Hervalte envoy from Venezuela. Plotting to finish me. Letter follows.

WOODWORTH.

Others beside the villagers of Lavouche were interested in my affair. At supper I learned that Andrew on his return from the village and with



the marketing basket on his arm had met Betty in the wood. She evinced a desire for conversation, of which the subject was nothing less than myself.

“And on what point did she display her interest?”

“She asked if you had known Señor Del Herval before coming to Lavouche, and as you had told me to say nothing to any one, Master Charles, I answered, ‘No, Miss Betty, not to my knowledge!’ Then she looked at me and said, ‘Andrew, you’re not a very good villain and you’re not accustomed to lying, for your face has turned red.’ Then I grew redder than ever, for I had been discovered in what I believed I should never be guilty of to a lady. She continued, ‘I see now that Mr. Woodworth and Señor Del Herval have met in other circumstances. Tell me, Andrew, how is it that Mr. Woodworth seems changed!’ I replied, ‘In one thing, Miss Betty, he will never change so long as he lives and that is in his love for you!’”

I laid down my fork. “Andrew, don’t you think I’m capable of conducting my own love affairs?” I inquired.

“You are very slow, I think, Master Charles,” was the imperturbable response.

“The devil I am!”

“Yes, sir. So I followed a bit of advice your father once gave me, namely, to speak a good word whenever the opportunity arose, even to a man to whom you owe money. I remember how in

particular he laid emphasis on that phrase 'even to a man to whom you owe money,' and Miss Betty is much more than that."

The aphorisms inlaid in Andrew's mind by my parent were as silver imbedded in steel; they were not to be removed.

"Continue," said I.

"She inquired of me what I knew of the talk about your having a map of one of France's forts. The servants, she explained, had heard the accusation in the village and were gossiping of it at Moore House. I stated that I was not in your confidence to the extent of knowing what particular forts you had maps of or how many. 'Master Charles' father often had very important papers in his possession, Miss Betty, as did his grandfather,' I said. 'It would only be natural then that Master Charles in his turn should have such.'"

I leaned back and laughed. "Next time Señor Del Hervalle calls I shall turn him over to you. What did Betty say?"

"For a while she did n't answer but stood in thought—and very lovely she looked—then she said, 'Andrew, you must keep good watch over Charles'; to which I replied, 'I will, Miss Betty, though in his great passion for you it may be difficult.' 'Is he very terrible when he is thinking of me?' she inquired. So I thought this was a good opportunity, Master Charles, to advance your suit, and I rejoined, 'Sometimes he is distraught, some-

times in a frenzy fine,' quoting words I once read in a book. Indeed, they were pointed out to me by your father in this very room, who asked if I had ever experienced similar symptoms. Miss Betty laughed and said she must be going home. 'Say nothing to Charlie,' were her final words. But she did not know of course that I could not do that. I think you are making progress in her affections."

"It would seem so," said I.

But why did Betty act so coldly toward me to my face, only to take an interest in me when away? Or was it only the interest which she would have shown in any person? Had she discovered something about Del Hervalle, something indefinite which yet had aroused her suspicions to the point where she believed him treacherous? Possibly she had good reason to think that I was in danger.

Though the sun was down, night held off and evening was not yet far advanced. The air was pleasant, drawing one into the open; and made restless by my thoughts I walked down to the water and strolled up the eastern beach. Before me the white sand stretched until it disappeared in the curve of the island; on the inner edge the wood bordered it with a dark green cover, on the other spread the ocean, swaying in long sinuous rolls that glistened beneath the light which yet whitened heaven. The swells traveling in across the water flooded upon the rim of sands with low insistent

music like that of an immense organ; flecks of foam slipped upward upon the spreading wave, paused, and glided back on the receding water, only to be caught once more and swept forward. A few gulls circled and soared afar out, white specks. Over all was the sense of immensity, of infinite distance.

I had walked perhaps two hundred yards when I saw Betty coming leisurely towards me. Her eyes were lifted to mine at the same time I perceived her; she faltered an instant, then advanced. After our meeting earlier in the day I wondered if, nay, expected that she would ignore my presence, or at best give me but cold greeting. In this, to my surprise, I was destined to be pleasantly disappointed; when she reached the spot where I stood, she stopped and fixed her gaze upon my face.

"I'm about to turn back," she said. "Will you walk with me? I've something to say."

Side by side therefore we moved up the beach. For a while she remained silent and I watched her, waiting for whatever statement she desired to make. Her straight lithe figure swung lightly and easily forward; no hat was on her head, leaving her golden hair uncovered; the curve of her cheek and brow was perfect. Her blue eyes I did not see until she raised them from the sand at which she looked. Some subject engaged her mind, that was plain, for she seemed almost oblivious of me walking by her side, and the fingers of her hands which she carried

clasped behind her twisted together until her step grew slower.

"Betty," I addressed her finally, "if it's my silly work of this afternoon that you're thinking about, I beg your pardon a hundred times. I'm a fool and am just beginning to learn it."

"I was angry at you, I must acknowledge," she remarked.

"You had every right to be. But Davis —" I stopped. The subject would not be improved by bringing his name into our conversation; my own fault had been glaring enough, while an excuse would only make things worse.

"Well, I was really obliged to you for taking me away from him," she answered smoothly.

"You were! By Jove, you did n't show it."

"It was a comedy."

"Tragedy, I thought it, for me," I said.

A smile dimpled her cheeks. She looked up finally and laughed; and in that laugh I saw that in whatever degree I had transgressed I was forgiven. If I had been in love with her before she went away to Venezuela, I was a thousand times more so now. She was adorable, I longed to take her in my arms and tell her so. But — not two mistakes in the same afternoon!

"Charlie," she said, and I noted that her face had suddenly grown grave, "have you any reason to think you are in danger?" I halted in my tracks — what did she know? "It seems strange, does n't

it," she continued, "that here on this quiet island, on quiet Lavouche, where everything has been peaceful and simple, we should talk of danger. It does n't seem possible, and yet — yet —"

"What is it, Betty?"

"You have n't answered my question?"

"Well, I don't know whether or not I'm in danger, but I have enemies here. On what they do depends the degree of danger."

"Have you any idea of it?"

"None of what I may expect."

Again she was silent, thinking. Then she said quickly, "This afternoon I met Jean's half-sister. She stopped me, saying she wished to speak to me, and this was her message, 'Tell Mr. Woodworth to go through no strange doors — to beware strange doors.' That was all. I sought to have her explain, but she would not. You know what an odd dark creature she is, who seems to have no intimate friends and to move through the life of Lavouche solitary and self-absorbed. When I used to come here as a little girl, I was always afraid of her, her black luminous eyes and strange dark face; and even now I feel a queer uncanny feeling when I talk with her. What did she mean? Why did she send that warning?"

"Search me, Betty." And as if I might find in them some explanation of the sibyllic message I thrust my hands into my pockets. We stared at each other.

"There must be some danger," she said with lowered voice.

It was not extraordinary that my thoughts flew to Del Hervalles. I turned and gazed up the beach toward where Moore House sat, now hidden by the wood; if there were danger lying in wait for me, the guest at yonder house was the one to know. Betty's eyes followed mine and her thoughts as well.

"I've something more to tell you, Charlie," she began. "The other night in the hall when you ran through the house and came back and we were all gathered together, I remembered a curious thing that Ethys Fenton told me when she returned from Forge. You know what happened there. One day when Jack Maitland was awaiting trial by the miners he crept out to the stable where he heard the Scotchman and the other villain talking — D'Urville, was that the man's name?"

"D'Urville is right."

"This machinist D'Urville was asking the Scotchman to escape with him, taking the gold. And Jack Maitland heard him say that he had twice been warned by the scarf-pin he wore, that it always worked loose when he was threatened by danger. I had forgotten all about it, then suddenly it popped into my head, for at lunch one noon Señor Del Hervalles's pin was loose, and some one, Muriel I think, called his attention to the fact. 'It is a warning,' he said with a smile, and pushed it in. 'Whenever anything unfortunate is about to hap-

pen to me, the pin comes out.' And he went on with other talk. Is it a coincidence that two men should be superstitious about the same thing, or is it — "

"The same man, you would ask?"

"Could such a thing be possible?" She stood rapt in contemplation of such a terrible event. "And then, when I mentioned his name, you remember, at the time when first we sailed together, you grew so excited and called him a scoundrel and asked me not to speak of you to him, that I did not know what to think."

It was half an inquiry; her face was a full question.

"Well, if you'd like to have your doubts put at rest, Betty," I said calmly, "I can assure you that Señor Del Hervalle is no other than D'Urville; the two gentlemen are one and the same. Del Hervalle — D'Urville, perhaps you'll observe a faint resemblance in the names. Let me tell you, the resemblance in character between the two men is vastly more striking and I have had acquaintance with both."

Betty was almost beyond speech with astonishment. "But an envoy of Venezuela!" she exclaimed.

"And a very shrewd one too he's made, I'll wager."

"Unbelievable that he could be the same man."



"Not at all — not at all, not when you come to know the gentleman as I do."

"It seems an utter —" She stopped, lips parted, at a loss to continue.

"If you are searching for big words," said I, "it's no help, because the fact nevertheless remains. And observe, Betty, I am asking you to keep this a secret — can you keep a secret?"

"Can I! You don't know me, Charlie Woodworth. But why?"

"For the simple reason I want to keep him unsuspecting that anybody besides himself knows this fact until Jack Maitland gets here — I have written him — then we'll light the fireworks."

"And meanwhile?"

She came closer, slipping her arm into mine and looking up into my eyes.

"And meanwhile all I ask is that you walk with me once in a while."

There was no answer. We moved slowly up the beach towards Moore House. Night was descending; the light had gone out of the sky while we talked, and now stars were beginning to twinkle, the dark velvety surface of the ocean reflecting them in swinging points of light. A cool breeze crept up and touched our cheeks and stirred the little tendrils about Betty's brow; in the wood a few birds were giving their last calls among the boughs; along our path the water curled and broke and spread upward in a line of snowy white. Night coming down

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upon the majestic ocean, night setting lamps along the sky, how inexpressibly beautiful! Little wonder thought of maps and enemies and danger vanished from my mind. A light hand was on my arm, the girl I loved was by my side, a dream of happiness filled the world.

## CHAPTER VIII

### A DELEGATION OF FISHERMEN

Pilon had at last won the prominence in the village which he had long desired; if it was only temporary, only by sufferance of the more sedate fishermen who knew him for what he was and only because there was a mystery in his accusation which I had not come forward to remove, it was none the less a degree of prominence. The vanity of the man therefore fed fat. And at last so impatient did he become, so thoroughly did he believe himself to have intimidated me, so confident did he feel that he, Pilon, was the prime mover in this affair, that he forgot Del Hervalle and conceived the brilliant notion of ending all mystery by taking over the map into his own care. Thus he would show what manner of man Pilon was, thus he would reap fresh honors "and save France." Now, in all likelihood, Pilon had escaped from Bordeaux before police hands could reach out and take him in the particular crime he chanced to be engaged in at the moment, but the above phrase sounded well though it meant nothing on his tongue. He would have sold France for two *sous* if he could have found a buyer.

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So it happened therefore next morning, while I was busy overhauling the cat-boat on the beach and putting a touch of paint here and there on her bottom, that the man appeared before me with this new purpose in his mind. Dressed in overalls and an old shirt and wearing a sou'wester against the sun, I was assiduously filling a crack with white lead when his shadow falling athwart the little craft caused me to look up.

He stared at me insolently, twirling his moustache. "Here you, I have come for the map," he said.

Without appearing to pay further attention to him I continued my work. Delicately I drew the paint brush along the line, paused to examine the result, then dipped the brush in the pail and repeated the operation.

"Here you, look here!" he shouted.

"Oh, you're there, are you?" I answered, resting my brush and straightening up. "What do you want?"

He glared, twirling his moustache furiously.

"For the map. Come, little man, you're keeping me waiting — me, Pilon."

I looked him over. His thick-set figure evidenced strength, but on his face were all the signs of brutal dissipation which betokened that strength undermined. No doubt in his native city he had been one of those rough fellows who constantly make trouble for the police, who jostle respectable people, ter-

rorize weaklings, and bully his own kind. In Paris he would have developed into an Apache, but he had never got to Paris and therefore remained a lazy, intolerable braggart. He it was who had let loose the story concerning my betraying France — at Del Hervalle's instigation of course. Evidently he expected no long resistance. I would provide him matter for another boastful tale.

"I am very busy this morning, my good Pilon," I said quietly. "You'll have to come another time." And I fell again to painting.

"Pilon comes but once and asks but once. Be quick! Run and fetch the map."

I paused, pretending stupidity. "But that makes three times you've asked for it."

"Asked! Pilon orders."

"Ordered then — three times, as I say."

My quietness deceived him, which was my purpose. He came nearer, struck a pose intended to create fear, I imagine; he stood with feet apart, one thumb hooked in his belt, a threatening look upon his face. This latter I returned mildly.

"Will you go, boy, or shall Pilon kick you to the house?"

"Did Señor Del Hervalle send you?"

"Señor Del Hervalle, no. I" — he tapped his breast — "I act alone."

I believed him. The envoy had not guessed how vigorously the seed he planted would thrive; Del Hervalle had shrunk in the fellow's estimation while

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Pilon had grown. I filled out the pause by drawing the brush along the seam.

"The boat should be finished first, monsieur," I considered aloud, "so that the sun will dry the paint."

"Boat, ha! I am to be kept waiting for a boat, *mon Dieu!*" And he burst into a peal of raucous laughter.

"I fear so."

"Pilon to wait on a boat, ha, ha!" He reached forth a hand and seized my shoulder. "I see I must kick you up yonder, after all."

As he clutched me, I settled myself against the bottom of the little craft, planted my heels in the sand, and stiffened my body. This would presently grow amusing, thought I. Pilon pulled; I did not budge. The veins swelled on his forehead and his chest was strained in effort; his lips parted and drew back like an animal's disclosing his yellow teeth.

"I am very busy to-day, Pilon," I remarked, "and the boat must be finished. Come to-morrow and then we'll see."

"*Scelerat!*" he hissed, jerking furiously, "you shall lick my boots."

Tug as he would, he could not make headway. Passion blazed up in him; he released his grip and struck a blow at me. But for this I did not wait. Springing forward, I seized him by the waist, tripped his feet, and flung him on the sand. Like

a wild-cat he was up, his hand flew to his coat, and he whipped out a knife. Before I could dart behind the boat he leaped at me, dodged the paint-brush which I cast at him, and plunged forward. As an amusement I suddenly had doubts of this encounter; the man was a savage at best, and now all his primitive instincts to slay were aroused; he was beyond reasoning. Side-stepping, I struck my fist at him scarcely with aim, a glancing blow which landed only on his shoulder though it checked his rush; yet it gave me the instant I needed to jump in, seize his wrist with my left hand, and throw my right arm about his body. The advantage was on his side, for in turning I had lost my balance, so that when we came down upon the sand I fell underneath. Still for the moment I breathed easier. He could not use his knife, nor could he gouge my eyes, since I held his left arm against his body. His fierce breath was in my face, his red-rimmed eyes glared into mine, and I was well aware that no half-way measures would now serve. I set myself to work with all the skill I had acquired in wrestling to overturn him and secure the mastery. Wrapping my leg about his and bringing it to bear, sinking my fist into his back as hard as I was able, and suddenly doubling back the hand which held the knife, I put forth every ounce of my strength. A gasp was wrung from his throat; his teeth set. Then suddenly slipping my free hand up and around his jaw and crooking my knee over his legs — a trick

learned from a Japanese wrestler — I gave his head a twist that he would long remember, holding his thighs as in a vice. His body relaxed, a groan of pain escaped him, and over he fell, I on top. I still gripped his jaw, twisted his face into the sand.

“Drop the knife,” I ordered.

An instant he hesitated, then let it fall. I sprang up, seized it with one hand and his collar with the other, and commanded him to rise; before he could gather himself to resist further I hustled him round the boat and hurled him into the water, where he dropped splashing on hands and knees. When he rose and faced me, I was ready to meet him, an oar held poised as a weapon.

“Move farther out,” I ordered. Sullenly he drew back until the water washed about his knees. “Now we can discuss the map calmly.”

He spat out brine and made no answer, except to glare at me; he was no longer the masterful Pilon. Bareheaded, for his cap had fallen off when I pitched him into the water and now floated a little distance off, his unkempt hair wet and bedraggled, the curl soaked out of his moustache, he remained only an enraged brute. One side of his face yet showed red where it had been bruised by the sand.

Finally he waded a few steps, as if to make land beyond where I stood, but this I had no intention of permitting. Still holding my oar aloft, I kept pace with him in his advance, moving along the beach



when he moved, halting when he halted. Neither of us uttered a word; speech was unnecessary, for each knew the mind of the other, and the game was played in silence and with exchanged looks. Twice he sought to outdistance me by speed in order to effect his escape from the water, though of course he met with disappointment; in the water he was at a disadvantage; the current impeded his progress, held his feet. At last he perceived that I was determined to balk him, and giving up further attempt set out to wade to the village, or if not so far until I grew weary of accompanying him. I chose to go even to Lavouche; I flung down the oar and drove him the whole way, he wading the distance knee-deep in water. Hereafter he would not be able to boast before the fishermen that he would cut my comb.

We were first seen approaching by a number of children, who ran to meet us, surprised at the spectacle of two men walking in such fashion; and they tailed along behind me in whispering wonder. Then came Gaspard, the boat-maker, and three or four men who had been calking boats on the sands.

"Hola! why do you walk in *The Throat*?" one shouted at him.

"He prefers it," I said. "His head is hot, but his feet are cool."

A burst of laughter greeted the sally. The men grasped the underlying significance of the picture; Pilon had bragged how he would trim my feathers,

and, behold, here I was sailing him along the water like a boat! It was humorous; the fishermen cracked jokes and shouted advice how one could best walk on water. Pilon answered nothing. He moved straight ahead, until we came to the beached boats, where I brought an end to the comedy.

"Come again to-morrow and we will discuss the map further," I stated in conclusion.

He shook the water out of his hair, scowled, and made straight up the street for the inn. Brandy is good for damp feet. I watched him, then turned to the men and children; they were an expectant audience, standing in a circle waiting until I should be pleased to explain the farce.

"Pilon is a great and wise man," said I. "Lavouche appears to be disturbed about a certain paper which I own, and Pilon said to himself that he would render a service to Lavouche, he would assure the mind of Lavouche, he would bring hither the document, he, Pilon. Therefore half an hour ago he came to me twirling his moustache at the place where I painted Jean's boat. 'Come, little man,' said he, 'run and fetch the paper, or I will kick you all the way up to the house. Make haste, do not keep Pilon waiting.'" I paused dramatically, opening my hands. "But I was busy with my painting. So he put out a hand in order, I suppose, to kick me along as he said. But could I leave the boat unpainted? No. We scuffled a little. Pilon, vexed, drew a knife — observe." And I produced his knife

Any other time I should have smiled, but did not do so now. I hesitated. To show the chart to them would be only to half-satisfy their desire for knowledge of the affair; not to grant their demand would put me in the position of being afraid to do so and their doubts would instantly change to belief in my guilt — this I knew, for I had grown up in Lavouche, so to speak, learning the quirks and crinkles of their minds. As I say, I hesitated between the two courses; Del Hervalle had certainly cast me into a quandary by this trick. Well, what he would gain by it was yet to be seen.

I went into the house, where I found Andrew gazing solemnly through a window at the small assemblage. Carrying the silver tankard into the kitchen, I poured forth the wine into a pitcher, extracted the plug which held the dish in place, and slipped the latter out. The map was dry and safe.

"Set a table on the grass," I bade Andrew.

When this was done, I spread the sheet upon it where all could see. The men pushed back their sou'westers and bent stolidly over the chart; no doubt it carried little information to their minds, but nevertheless they studied it with satisfaction; they could return to the village and report that they had indeed beheld the disputed drawing.

"Is Pilon a liar?" scornfully asked that worthy, who had been gazing upon the table as eagerly as the others.

"It looks like nothing," one fisherman said sagely.



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"Nothing at all," agreed another.

With a stubby forefinger still resting upon the sheet Surçon regarded me. "Is it a fort?"

"Yes."

"Of France?"

"No."

"Will you swear to it?"

"How can I swear when I don't know of what country it is? But I believe it is one of Germany's."

"Then why can't you swear?"

"Because I do not know positively."

He looked at the map, then at me, then again at the map. All the others listened with avid ears. Only Jean stood back a pace, with arms folded, declining to join in their business. For him my word was sufficient.

"We must have no harm come to France," said a fisherman.

"None will come to her. Use your eyes, man — this is a German map," I declared.

"That is true, Charles Woodworth."

But I had counted too soon upon the effect of such a statement. Here Del Hervalle, through his pupil, showed his genius; his scheme had been thoroughly thought out, no detail overlooked, no provision against mistake missed. Pilon went on with his part, and if he were a ruffian, yet he was not a fool.

"One moment, *Monsieur le Maire*," he addressed Surçon, "consider the writing. If it is a French

map for Frenchmen, it would be in the French language. But if it is a French map to sell to Germans, I ask you, would it be written in French or in German?"

"*Mon Dieu!* German, to be sure."

Pilon stretched forth one of his hands. "This is a French map in German."

"Or a German map in German," I countered.

The others stood in silence, their minds balanced between two opinions. I said it was German and my word had always been respected—and yet stranger things had occurred than maps being sold by reputable people. Pilon maintained it was French. Of course every one knew what Pilon's word was worth; yet had he not been right and I wrong when he described the map? As for Pilon he was well satisfied with the way affairs were going. One thumb was hooked in his belt as was its habit; the other, together with forefinger, twisted and twirled and flourished first one end of his moustache and then the other. He was in his element; he stood in the limelight; he had regained his former position of prominence, which I had temporarily dashed when I drove him wading to Lavouche. From time to time he cast an insolent look at me, while the fishermen studied and weighed and considered. From time to time he smiled triumphantly. And he was not yet done.

"Ask Monsieur Woodworth what a certain German gentleman does here in Lavouche, if this is

not a French map for Germans?" he said to Surçon. "Why does that gentleman stay here in the village apparently doing nothing? Did he not arrive the same afternoon as Monsieur Woodworth? Does he not visit at this house? Is it likely that such a gentleman would stop here if he had not special business? Possibly Monsieur can inform us of the nature of that business."

Now, as he concluded and before any one could speak, Fortune, who had until now stood neutral, stepped over to Pilon's side. It was a scurvy trick; without any additional weight of evidence against me I had all the difficulties to contend with I could well manage. Then to fling another weight into the opposite scale!

At this instant when matters hung by a hair the German himself strolled out of the wood. Surprise sprang upon his face at the unexpected group before the door; he paused, but only for a brief interval, then continued to advance, lightly switching stalks of grass with his bamboo stick. His face once more was composed. If he experienced any curiosity as to this unwonted gathering, it was not apparent, and since all eyes were fastened on him, making retreat impossible, he came forward without hesitation.

"But since the gentleman himself is here, perhaps he will relieve Monsieur Woodworth of the necessity of answering," continued Pilon.

The turn of the affair was dramatic and in his favor; the scoundrel could be nothing else but



pleased. Glances passed among the fishermen. They too were well suited by the dramatic occurrence.

As for the Baron, he looked from one to another of the group, until his eyes suddenly fell on the map spread out upon the table. However he betrayed no emotion. His look rested on me thoughtfully, then he smiled.

"I beg your pardon," he said in French. "I was unaware that I interrupted a conference. I will withdraw."

"Remain, monsieur. It concerns you," Surçon replied. "May I, as mayor of the village of Lavouche, inquire the purpose of your residence on the island?"

By the line that creased his brow I could see that the Baron was doing some fast thinking. To come all at once into a council as he had done, to perceive the map spread open to a dozen eyes, the map which he was determined to have, that would have disconcerted any man. And further to be immediately asked the explanation of his sojourn was under the circumstances extremely embarrassing. What his thoughts were would have been interesting to know. The fishermen, myself, the open map—what did he imagine concerning it all?

"I've private interests with this gentleman," he responded, indicating me by a gesture.

"May I inquire what these are?"

Whether he suspected that I had made known our relations, or whether he simply determined upon

a bold stroke of chance, I do not undertake to state. At any rate, he drew his walking-stick slowly through his fingers and said:

"The question appears impertinent, *Monsieur le Maire*, so long as I give you no occasion to find fault with my conduct. However, if the functions of your office include an interrogation of visitors, I'll answer. I'm here for the purpose of obtaining this map from Monsieur Woodworth." And swinging his stick to and fro he awaited further questions.

There was need of none. Surçon and his companions took a long look at him, next at me, and finally at each other. Pilon twirled his moustache triumphantly; Jean continued with arms folded, stolid, unmoved; and I wanted to laugh—laugh hysterically at the sheer grotesqueness of the thing.

Pilon put out a hand to take the map. I struck it away.

"Not yet, my friend," I said, and folding the sheet slipped it into my pocket.

"We will bid you good evening and depart to consider this matter further," Surçon said; and he bowed with a formal little bow that sat strangely on his figure, a bow however which was full of significance.

"As you please," said I.

And down the slope they went in silence, until they turned and vanished around the wood. After that their voices broke out in a chatter which pres-

ently died away as they receded. Jean had remained. I drew him to one side and urged him not to believe appearances; for answer he assured me that he trusted my word before everything else in the world. I gave him the letter and telegram I had written to Maitland, explained that it would clear up this matter, and warned him to carry them with his own hands to the neighboring railroad station. This he agreed to do first thing next morning, after which he took his departure.

Then I went back to the Baron, who was gazing speculatively out to sea.

"Did I embarrass you by my little speech, Mr. Woodworth?" he inquired.

"We'll both be embarrassed by it, I fear, in the near future."

"If agreeable to you, I'll be pleased to be further informed of this extraordinary matter."

"The right is yours. Our neighbor, Señor Del Hervalle, spread the report that I possessed a map of a French fort which I was about to sell to you. As a result, I was in the midst of an investigation when you arrived; your words, however, terminated it."

"Ah, I see," the Baron said. He mused a moment. "I'm beginning to develop a strong admiration for our Venezuelan friend."

## CHAPTER IX

### UNDER SURVEILLANCE

The chief business of fishermen is to fish; other affairs have therefore to be arranged accordingly. It seemed that the villagers who were now thoroughly convinced of my complicity in selling one of France's war maps did not quite know what to do about the matter. I was an American citizen and I was on American soil; there did not appear to be a law that any one knew of which fitted the case. The delegation, with the exception of Jean, having invited a number of other men to join them in consultation, met after supper in Surçon's house. Long they talked, discussed, agreed, and bickered without arriving anywhere, until finally Surçon himself thumped the table and said they would set a guard on me and one on the German in order that the paper should not be passed between us; and in the interval an effort should be made to secure the map, which if successful would result in its either being destroyed or sent to France. That seemed as good a plan as any — and meanwhile it was time for bed.

The first thing that I saw in the morning, in consequence of this decision, was the figure of a man

sitting on the grass before Stag Lodge, with his back to the trunk of a tree, a cigarette in his mouth and his face towards my door. When I went out to him I discovered the man to be Esper, the little rascal at whom Pilon had flung the wine-glass the first afternoon I visited the inn. He made himself very comfortable; the sun slanted under the boughs and fell warm upon his body and he smoked in peace and indolence; for it was a task that would require little exertion, that is, if I were sensible and remained at home and did not move about, causing him inconvenience. He might even take naps — so he explained to me, after stating the purpose of his presence here. From his standpoint there appeared to be certain obligations on my side as well as on his.

He was a meager, middle-aged, sharp, undersized man, but quick and impudent; he wore neither moustache nor beard, and the features of his face were all bent to one side, as if he had stood in a strong wind; his eyes were small and bright, his nose too long, and a tricky smile kept constantly coming and going upon his lips. Altogether he was just the sort of fellow to tail after Pilon; in Paris, when he drifted about the Montmartre district, he was probably known as *The Rat*, or *The Beak*, or by some equally suggestive name. A dirty red silk handkerchief was tied about his neck, a bunch of fish cord stuck out of one of his pockets. In the conversation which ensued he informed me of what

decision had been reached by the villagers as to myself, also that Pilon would some day put a knife into my back.

I jingled the coins in my pocket. He pricked up an ear.

"You're well paid for this?" I asked.

He snapped his fingers.

After a moment I sat down upon the grass and drew forth my cigarette case. Flinging away the cigarette he smoked, he reached out his hand as would one comrade to another and helped himself to three, one of which he lighted.

"You don't fish much of late, you and Descarte and Pilon?"

"La, la, why should we fish?"

"To be sure, why should you, while Señor Del Hervalles remains here."

"Señor Del Hervalles?" His tone was polite.

"He pays of course — but Pilon skims the cream, I suppose." A flicker went over his face. "And you and Descarte take what he gives you, which is little. Is n't that the case?"

"Monsieur, you talk of strange things."

I took out a dollar and let it lie in my open palm, where he regarded it steadily out of the notch of his eye.

"Is n't such the case?"

"No, monsieur."

I laid a second beside the first. "Eh?"

He considered. "No, monsieur."

A third was added and I looked the question.

"No, monsieur," said he at last. I moved my hand to return the money to my pocket. "Yes, monsieur," he corrected.

"Not so fast, Esper," as he stretched his fingers to take them. "Pilon drinks the cream, eh?"

"Yes, damn him! And some night he'll bite the blade of a knife!"

He spat out the words venomously. It was plain to see that there was little love lost between the rogues; Esper and Descarte squirmed under their leader's domineering. I handed him the dollars. Three facts I had discovered as a result of our brief transaction: Del Hervalle was keeping the men in his pay for some purpose or other, Pilon had aroused the secret jealousy of the other two by retaining the major part of the hire-money, and this rascal in front of me could be purchased.

Esper proved to be not such an unpleasant companion as I had imagined. He possessed a certain lively form of wit and regaled me with tales of escapades through which he had passed in various European cities. By a natural inference he should now have been in the galleys, but when I mentioned that fact to him he looked at me in pained surprise.

"What, the galleys for a few little jests!" he exclaimed.

Descarte, who had been set to watch the Baron, did not find his task so pleasant. The German simply ignored his presence, made no response to the

man's overtures towards conversation, and walked him about until the fellow's feet were blistered. As I amused myself by joking with Esper, Von Hussman took his pleasure in seeing the other fellow exercise. As he told me afterwards, he had in the beginning no intention of making Descarte earn his warder's pence, but when the man protested that his feet were growing sore the Baron then deliberately put himself in motion. Lavouche could not interfere; indeed, it began to see the humor of the match. Von Hussman walked from the village to the rock of *La Dent*; he followed up the main beach five miles to the lighthouse; returning, he made me a brief visit, circled the island, and went south. By noon he had covered fifteen miles. Descarte thought at last he was done, but he did not guess the depths of Teuton villainy. At one o'clock Von Hussman set forth again and walked this time ten miles beyond the lighthouse. They arrived at the village towards evening and entered the inn.

"Madame," said the Baron, "bring me a pint of wine. I must walk thrice around the island before supper. Afterwards —"

But there was to be no afterwards for Descarte. He staggered to a table and fell into a seat.

"*Mon Dieu, mon Dieu!* This wild beast has killed me!" he cried; and sat in a stupor until the inn-woman brought him a glass of brandy.

About the middle of the afternoon Jean came to



inform me that both letter and telegram had been sent and were now speeding towards New York. That eased my mind of a weight. With Maitland and Mr. Fenton present to identify Del Hervalle as the D'Urville of Forge, thief and murderer, even Mr. Moore could no longer deny acknowledgment of the man's identity. Cheered by this thought and having fresh confidence that now things would begin to run aright, I set out for Moore House with my mind made up to lay aside worry and enjoy Betty's company. Whether Esper would have the courage, or perhaps the better word is audacity, to follow at my heels into Moore House was a question whose solution afforded me a minor interest. The rascal did not oppose my movements; at noon I had had Andrew supply him with a meal better than he had tasted for many a day, and this, with a handful of cigars which I discovered he had appropriated from my jar, kept him in good humor. Andrew, to be sure, was horrified at having such a guest at Stag Lodge, but then Andrew was always fastidious.

I found Betty and Muriel Nesbit upon the lawn.

"Who is that?" they both exclaimed, when they beheld Esper lounging at my side.

"This is my squire." The little Frenchman smirked. "Take off your hat," I ordered. He did so. "And retire to that tree."

He held out his hand.

"What do you want?"

Tapping his trousers pocket so that the dollars I had given him clinked, he lowered one eyelid and again stretched forth his hand. This was bargaining carried too far. I caught him by the scruff of the neck, shook him once, and marched him to the tree to which I had earlier pointed.

"Oh, la, if you desire, monsieur." And he composed himself in comfort.

"In the name of mystery, what does this mean?" Muriel exclaimed.

"That fellow Esper presumed on our new acquaintance. The village has taken it into its head that I'm about to injure France by selling a document I have to Germany. Hence, Esper. He is my guard."

"How ridiculous!"

"On the contrary, it's serious. I'm a watched man. When Lavouche makes up its mind to do a thing, Lavouche does it in earnest. The esteem in which I supposed myself to be held by the good villagers has turned out to be suspicion, and this fellow has been assigned to act as my guard."

They looked at him as if he might have been a strange fish out of the sea—a strange fish he was, for that matter, in Lavouche waters. Unembarrassed, pleased in fact as he afterwards related to me by the fine attention of such beautiful ladies, an honor he had rarely been accorded, he smirked and smiled impudently and cocked his old hat on one side.

We strolled upon the lawn. Some time later a servant approached and informed me that Mr. Moore would be pleased to have me join him in the library. Making my excuses to the young ladies, I followed him into the house and to the room designated, where I found Mr. Moore, Señor Del Hervalle, and the latter's secretary, all sitting about a table. The top was strewn with papers; the gentlemen were busy on diplomatic affairs. An agreement had been reached, it appeared, between the representative of our government and that of Venezuela in regard to a certain concession which an American rubber company had purchased in the republic to the south and which had subsequently become involved in dispute. The company had appealed to the United States government; this was one of the minor matters which had occupied Mr. Moore while upon his mission and engaged him now during his sojourn here in Lavouche, where he and his guest might work without interruption and enjoy the coolness of a northern climate. A memorandum of agreement had been prepared, and as they wished a witness's name appended to the same before they submitted it to the various parties concerned, I affixed my signature to the papers. In the course of the conversation I learned that Señor Del Hervalle would presently return to Venezuela. The most pressing matters upon which the two men had been negotiating had been satisfactorily concluded; others would be later settled;

a week perhaps would yet be necessary to discuss certain details and arrange for a future continuance of diplomatic inquiries. In a week at the latest Señor Del Hervalle planned to take his departure from Lavouche to visit New York, Washington, and afterwards sail to South America.

And during that week? I looked at the plump Frenchman; he complacently returned my gaze. Suave, dignified, pleasant, garbed in his official frock and wearing a handsome ascot and immaculate linen, he played the rôle of a government functionary with all the assurance and all the delicate touches of art which bespoke a master-actor. I asked myself if it were indeed acting. Did this work not come more naturally to his genius than that of a mechanic carrying an iron wrench? Was not his talent rather of the scope which manipulates the rods and levers of great affairs than the bolts and screws of little schemes? In other words, was he not rather the real man here than he had seemed at Forge — more Del Hervalle than he ever had been D'Urville? Yet he could not wholly wipe off the grease acquired when he wore a blouse instead of a coat, could not wholly abandon little schemes and devote himself utterly to great ones. For behold him playing tag for a map with an insignificant fellow named Charles Woodworth!

It was at dinner that evening, to which I remained, that the subject of my surveillance naturally came up for discussion. One could not have

such a shadow as Esper following at heel or waiting before a door like a patient terrier for his master without creating comment. Therefore I narrated the visit which had been made to me by the fishermen, mentioning merely that they suspected me of disposing of a military map stolen from France to a German stranger.

"Such is not the case, Mr. Woodworth?" It was Davis who asked the question, in his usual impassive voice.

"I can assure you that it's not," said I. "I also recognize your interest in the matter since our embroilment upon the lawn."

"Perhaps I could justify you to Lavouche," Mr. Moore said smoothly, "if I examined the document."

"That would be agreeable to me."

"Since the villagers have seen it," he continued, "it has become more or less of a public document. You stand at present in need of an advocate. Of course the charge is an absurd canard, and it's rather remarkable how it started. Some one is usually responsible for such a report."

"A fellow named Pilon seems to be the chief busybody."

"I've heard of him, also heard that you threw him into the water. Was not that the story, Betty? However, it does n't explain the circumstance of the insinuation about you which has been spread so freely."

"There's a stranger in the village, is there not?" Señor Del Hervalle inquired blandly.

Muriel now entered the conversation.

"And a very good-looking one. I passed him once in the wood road. What he's doing here on the island, I don't know, but I'm sure he's a gentleman who would be well worth making the acquaintance of. Mr. Moore, you might bring him over. You and Señor Del Hervalle and Mr. Davis are always busy over papers and Mr. Woodworth apparently has no time to spare" — she flashed a disdainful look at me — "so all the excitement Betty and I can have is in going down and sighing over the sad sea waves."

"If you've nothing left but sighing, I shall certainly bring this gentleman over to occupy you, young ladies."

"Thank you, I'll put on my best frock to-morrow afternoon and be waiting at the door."

By this diversion the subject of the map was relegated to the background; nor did I wish it to be elsewhere. I gave my attention chiefly to Betty, who sat by my side, and in a minor degree to Muriel, to whom I owed a return for her intimation as to my lack of gallantry. Her mind was quick, her tongue equally so, and we crossed swords more than once in little encounters. She was not partial; Mr. Moore, Señor Del Hervalle, Davis, all of us had our wit kept busy giving as good as she sent.

Talk drifted on. Betty, with whom I had been conversing, turned to Davis, who sat on her opposite side, and engaged his attention. Through the banter passing back and forth I could catch the trend of their words. She was lightly chaffing him about his attentions to Margot of the village; it had been reported that he had been seen sailing with her, again walking in the wood. His answers were given in a low voice and with a shadow of a smile. Probably he experienced a secret exultation. Betty had soundly rated me, he remembered, for once interrupting their talk; indeed, she had not since displayed any difference of attitude towards him as a result of his presumptuous words, as might have been expected, and moreover she showed a regard for his comings and goings. Was there a little malice in her talk of Margot, a little jealousy? Thus probably he was moved to believe. He did not deny her impeachment, nor excuse his actions; he left her to infer that all she said might have been possible and with others too might not be impossible. The innocent questions she now and then slipped into the general talk were unnoted. It went something like this: Margot had told her (white little fib) that he confided in her. A man desired a friendly confidant, said he. Had Margot said that no other woman should walk in the wood with him? Oh, Margot might say foolish things, Margot had a temper. What did Margot mean when she said that he knew everything? He con-

sidered, then said that Margot was a strange woman. Betty's talk ran on for a time. What place had Margot meant when she told her that some one ought to beware of strange doors?

"The place? Why, the house —" He stopped suddenly and gave her a swift searching look. "Did Margot say that?"

"Yes, and I've wondered at what she hinted."

"I regret that I'm not informed."

"You started to mention a place," she said, her bright eyes exercising all of their fascination.

Half an instant he hesitated, then passed the subject with an evasive answer. Betty had nearly snared him — nearly, but not quite; just in time he had caught the words back and now was on guard. I could imagine, judging from a fleeting scowl on his face, that he was not at that moment considering Margot with favor.

After the meal was finished we went into the drawing-room, where Betty seated herself at the piano. The long windows were open, we gentlemen had permission to smoke and (as Muriel had said) ascend to our after-dinner heaven. She joined Betty, and together they thumped out one of those four-hand duets which everybody abominates, but which Mr. Moore had requested.

I sauntered to the side of the little envoy, who stood alone.

"Does n't this remind you of old times in Forge House — but I forget myself," I said. "You were



not on the same social footing there as Frederick Douglass."

He slowly removed his long amber cigarette holder.

"Unfortunately, my good Charles, I was not." So he no longer made pretense of denial that Forge had known him. "Yet you and I had a conversation or two."

"In the machine-shop, yes."

"There it was, I believe."

"Have your fingers lost their skill, Señor?"

Smiling, he raised one short hand, looked at it, turned it over, and turned it back.

"What do you think?"

"Oh, I fancy you could pick a lock if you put yourself to it."

"It has been some time since I tried," said he.

Mr. Moore joined us.

"Bring over the map to-morrow afternoon," he said to me. "Then I'll quiet this talk among the villagers. A word from me will go a long way, I think, towards assuring them." And to this I agreed.

Towards ten o'clock I took my leave. As I bade them all good-night, I observed that Davis was absent. A few minutes previous he had been in conversation with Señor Del Hervalle; so in order to get an inkling of his whereabouts, if possible, I mentioned that I was sorry that he was not present to receive my adieux.

"I have sent him away on a certain matter," the Señor explained.

It flashed into my mind that he had gone ahead to waylay me, but second judgment told me this was absurd. Absurd it proved when I and my guard Esper made our way home. Señor Del Hervalle had undoubtedly dispatched him to the library to finish certain work.

"That was a magnificent meal, that of yours, monsieur," Esper remarked reflectively, as we proceeded.

"How do you know?"

"I observed through a window. As yet, master, I have dined only on air."

"Am I supposed to feed you as well as to have you shadow me?"

"*Mon Dieu*, to be sure. I am not a fish to suck water, or a bird to peck leaves. How else am I to eat?"

Certainly, how else if I did not provide for him? It was the clearest thing in the world. When we reached Stag Lodge, I therefore led him into the kitchen, where Andrew gazed at him with disfavor.

"What will you have to eat?" I asked dryly.

Scratching his nose and smiling, he considered.

"Consommé, a turbot, if it please you, monsieur, a fillet of beef à la creole, a salad of —"

"Stop! where did you learn all that?" I demanded.

His surprise was admirable, surprise tinged with injury.

"I? I was once a *valet-de-chambre* to a gentleman of Marseilles; and, if you please, a meringue also, camambert —"

Andrew folded his hands across his paunch in strong disapproval. Then he turned and entered the pantry. When he came forth, he bore a single plate.

"And champagne and a liqueur," concluded Esper with a smirk.

Andrew held out the dish. On it lay a crust of bread and two dried herrings.

## CHAPTER X

### THE MESSAGE

A telegram was brought to me early next morning. It had been dispatched the previous day by Billy Harrington, announcing his anticipated arrival on this same afternoon, and by some unexplainable burst of energy on the part of the agent at the neighboring railway station had at once been forwarded. I told Andrew to prepare a chamber. Furthermore I stated that I would hire Antoine's cart and donkey in which to meet and convey my guest to Lavouche. Cart and donkey were well paired. The latter might be conceived to have been born between the cart-shafts, so intimately associated was he with them. He was the single animal in the village larger than a cat or dog, and with his vehicle was the sole means by which such bales and boxes as did not come by boat were brought to Lavouche. *Papillon*, Butterfly, was the gay appellation which his master had bestowed upon him, doubtless because his ears approached the proportions of wings. He had a round little body, a mouse-colored coat, a mild eye, a philosophical disposition, and ideas of his own on what constituted the necessary rate of speed.

When I had finished breakfast, I walked down to the wharf for a breath of fresh air. The rogue who had accompanied me about yesterday was nowhere to be seen; apparently he would not risk what Andrew might serve him for a morning meal and had gone to the village to break his fast. Dangling my feet over the edge of the little wharf, I smoked my pipe and observed the sea. The sun was flashing brightly over the water, gulls were sweeping about or floating upon the surface, swaying now high, now low, on the undulations of the swells. Off in the east there was a haze of smoke, which thickened until I could make out the hull of a vessel but not its lines. For half an hour it remained apparently without movement and was still in the same spot when I rose to go — some yacht or steamer that had, I guessed, encountered a mishap to its machinery. A gentle breeze ruffled the surface of the water from time to time. Overhead thin streamers of haze drifted across the sky, carrying beneath them dim shadows upon the sea. After a final look I returned to the house, where I took the map from the tankard and examined it afresh.

Now that it had been seen by so many eyes, it had acquired more interest in mine; I traced again the lines and dots, analyzed anew its system of gun arrangement and defense, and read once more the notes upon the margin inscribed in stiff angular script. Nothing about it had changed. But I

studied it more closely than I had ever done before, with an eye for detail and for its distinguishing peculiarities. In one corner of the sheet was drawn a compass to adjust the fortress relatively to points of the earth, and by this indicator I perceived that the major number of guns were planted in their pits so as to hurl shells in a westerly direction, though of course they could be swung upon their pedestals to any point of the horizon. The faces of the embrasures, too, indicated that in case of attack it might be expected from the same point, — these and the general arrangements of defensive galleries for machine-guns and rifles. On the right was the station of the range-finders, at a superior elevation and connected with the gun-pits by telephone. Evidently the fortress crowned some height that commanded a sweep of space to westward; and as I considered the import of this fact my opinion that it was a German military work became more than ever confirmed. France lay westward from Germany.

With the map spread before me I could not help but let my imagination run free in conjured pictures of that armed state of peace made significant by the line which separated those two countries. One summer I had wandered upon the precincts of Alsace and Lorraine, where I had been impressed by the silent, alert watchfulness and ever-present masses of soldiers. From a distance I had seen one of Germany's fortifications, yet only from a

distance, as visitors were not permitted to visit it. Always there was evident a feeling of uncertainty, a sense of expectancy, that sometime France would spring upon these forts in an endeavor to realize her dream of recapturing the two provinces.

And now here before my eyes lay what France would give a fortune to possess! If ever war were determined upon, she would have with it the key to at least one door; with it she could post her own guns and cast her bursting shells into the pits, rush the outpost by a night attack, and smash through this point in the long line of steel that bristled along her eastern border all the way from Belgium up to the Alps. Men had given, and still would give, their lives to win such information as was inscribed upon this piece of paper. How many daring spies, how many fearless officers, had stolen about the base of these bastions or penetrated to their interior, in the end to be caught, tried, and delivered to an inglorious death! In that secret and vigilant game which nations play beneath an outward manifestation of friendly good-will, there is neither pause nor leniency! Spies vanish, and the game goes on. One in a dozen succeeds in small measure, one in a thousand greatly. Had Frederick Douglass, that cool and canny Scotchman, been the thousandth man? Or had he, by some hook or crook, come at an original map? That seemed even more impossible. Two years the diagram had lain idle in my possession; now, as if light and air exerted upon it some

subtle change and invested it with an active, malignant character, it radiated an unnatural influence and evil attraction. Baron Von Hussman desired it, Señor Del Hervalle strove for it, Lavouche quarreled over it; it threatened to turn this quiet, peaceful island into an isle of strife. Like one of those jewels out of an Indian temple accursed by being stolen from a sacred image, it promised to bestow harm on every hand that touched it. Well, if such were to be the case, I, like those daring pillagers who had got their fingers on the Indian gems, would hold it the tighter.

Having put away the map, I strolled out upon the path which led through the wood to the road. The clear fresh air full of odorous scents was like wine. Over my head the boughs met in an arch, which made my advance like that of walking along the aisle of some Gothic cathedral; no thick tangle of underbrush encumbered the prospect, only clumps of bushes grew at intervals, through which one had long, green mistily lighted vistas; and everywhere birds twittered and sang, while lance-like lines of sunshine shot downward through apertures in the boughs. I startled a rabbit, which leaped a pace or two, sat listening for a moment motionless as a stone animal, then dove suddenly into cover. Sharing the island with pines and hemlocks were foliaged trees, here and there an oak or walnut or birch. Vines of the trailing arbutus ran underfoot, while withes of wild grape climbed and hung their



bushy garlands on high; bluebells shook their fragile cups in little corners; where rock cropped out, moss and ferns had taken root; now and again one beheld some fallen monster of a tree that had lived its time and toppled over and now lay in decay, the habitation of colonies of insects. On this morning all was life, all was brightness, all was happiness in the hearts of these wood-folk.

Presently, as I came round a thicket, I perceived a standing figure up the path, which I recognized as that of Betty. A wide-brimmed garden hat of straw was upon her head, her dress was of some simple white material; in one hand she carried a small basket in which were wild flowers, the other, closed, was held to her cheek in thought. She did not note my approach until I was before her, when with a start she dropped her hand.

"Where did you come from?" she exclaimed.

"Along the path, to be sure."

"I was coming to see you — and yet —"

"What, Betty?"

"My reason seems so silly, I stopped. I could not make up my mind. I came a little way, and then it appeared so ridiculous a thing to do, I halted; but the more I thought, the more anxious I grew, and came on again, then once more stopped, and I don't know what to think."

"Does it concern me?"

"Yes; oh, do be careful, Charlie!"

"Come, tell me what's the matter."

Her blue eyes looked into mine, her lip quivered the barest thing in the world.

"If anything happened to you — now." Unconsciously she put out her hand as if to ward off impending danger. I caught the hand in mine.

"Would you care, Betty?"

She looked confusedly about, sought to withdraw her fingers, then her eyes came back to mine. A faint flush rose and faded in her cheeks.

"I—I—" she began at last, but did not finish.

"I love you, as you know, Betty, have always loved you, never will cease to love you, whatever may happen to me."

For a moment she stood unmoving; and her eyes widened as she conjured up vague and unknown fears. Her fingers tightened on mine. Then she drew them free, she dropped her basket and laid her hands upon her bosom.

"If anything should happen," she said, lifting her face, looking up at the wood and beyond me into a distance that none but she could see, "now that you have come back, now that you have come when I have waited, if anything should happen —"

She ceased. Her face remained upheld, pale, still gazing with eyes far past me.

"You love me, Betty?" I said, low.

"It would break my heart if anything happened."

There in the wood, with the birds caroling about us, dropping liquid notes of melody, pouring silver

music among the trees with the sunshine sifting in bright lines and slanting bare through the branches, with all the air filled with fragrance, with all the world atune in happiness, I learned that her love was mine. The great joy had come. I held her fast in my embrace, while our lips met.

"Tell me what it is you fear, sweetheart," I said at last.

"That warning — Margot has said it again, 'Beware strange doors.' Early this morning Stevens, our servant, went to the village on an errand for the kitchen and met her. She stopped and said, 'Tell these words to Miss Moore, *Beware strange doors.*' That was all. When Stevens asked her if there was not something further, she asked to have me repeat them to you. Then she went away. What does it all mean? What is going to happen? Are you in danger, Charlie? Is your life threatened? Tell me."

I remained silent, for I could not tell her all I knew and all I suspected.

"She is a singular woman," said I at last. "She may know a little of something and her imagination supply the rest."

"But Mr. Davis — he too knows whatever it is, he nearly told me what door was meant. If he only had! And since he knows, Señor Del Hervalle must know; are they all leagued against you? Why is it? what is it? Our little island seems to have become all at once a place of mystery."

"All will turn out right, Betty. And for to-day at least I have nothing to fear. This afternoon I'll see your father and show him the map; I think I'll tell him all that has happened. Then I shall go with Antoine's donkey to meet my friend who is coming — he will be here to help. Besides, I have written to Jack Maitland and Mr. Fenton."

"They're coming?"

"I think they will," I answered with a smile. For I could hardly imagine anything stopping them when it was a question of Del Hervalles. "So you see that things are not so bad, after all. When they have arrived, we shall clear up the whole business — Señor Del Hervalles and all."

But she was yet uneasy.

"Something tells me — a premonition — that you are in danger. And those words, those strange words!"

"I'll look very carefully at all the doors I enter, even my own."

For a time we walked forward, moving a little way and halting. Her hand was in mine, her lips had been lifted to mine, she had acknowledged that her love was mine. What more could I ask? Content filled my heart and a great happiness. Of danger I ceased to think, of the intrigues of Señor Del Hervalles, of the malice of his secretary, of the warning given by Margot, of the braggings of Pilon, of the suspicions of the village. I had the love of the girl who walked beside me; let the world run

as it would, I was content. Stooping, I plucked a sprig of arbutus, brushed it of dust, and divided it. Half I gave to Betty, half I kept. It would be the memento of this day, of this hour, when we plighted our troth. So long as we lived we should keep the halves; though they should wither, our love should keep them fresh and we would treasure them as most precious. Those radiant minutes were all too short. Would that we could stroll on through this wood, said I, until time ceased, with only the trees and sunshine and ourselves! But at last Betty stated that she must return. Once more softly she told me she loved me, stood close in my embrace, and pressed her warm lips on mine, then departed. Up the path she tripped, paused to waft me a kiss with her hand, and was lost to sight.

How long I stood in a sort of ecstasy of delight I know not. No thought ran in my mind; I remained in a condition of rapture, knowing, feeling, but not reasoning withal, that a great joy had descended as from heaven and wrapped me round in a shining garment. Gradually I returned to earth. I became aware of a man standing a little way off by a tree. He slouched on his feet, he smiled a furtive smile and scratched his nose.

"How long have you stood there!" I roared.

"Some time, monsieur," he smirked, approaching.

"You scoundrel!"

"Yes, monsieur!"

"You villain!"

"Yes, monsieur."

"You under-sized, crooked-faced, eaves-dropping, invidious son of a degenerate cockroach!"

"At your service, monsieur. And, monsieur?"

"What?" I thundered.

"Will you kindly repeat that statement? That is a very fine account. I have never had the honor of being addressed by that name. If monsieur will repeat that admirable collection?" And he waited, pert, impudent, head cocked on one side at attention.

"Were you there all the time?" I questioned fiercely.

He looked at me with a calculating eye.

"No, monsieur, I am but just come."

"You are a rogue."

"Possibly."

"And an incorrigible scamp."

"Probably, monsieur."

Nothing could perturb such effrontery. I turned on my heel and set out for home. To have this fellow for a spectator of our love! It was like a gutter-snipe peering through a window at one's most sacred rite. I was in no mood for his brazen wit, and as I strode through the wood let him follow as best he might; the jest of having him accompany me about had on a sudden lost its savor.

"Pardon, monsieur, I should have arrived earlier," he began politely, at my heels.

"You were early enough, as it was," I said significantly.

"Earlier, monsieur, if I had not been delayed by a little accident which occurred in the village. You would not be interested in it?"

We walked a distance.

"What accident?" I asked.

"Oh, one of the fishermen hurt. You would not, as I say, be interested. It was only that Jean —"

"What, Jean!" I stopped.

"Yes, but what matter? Have you any more of those exquisite cigarettes in your house, master?"

I caught him by the shoulder and shook him.

"Never mind about the cigarettes. Tell me of Jean, and be quick!"

His smile came and went. He changed from one foot to the other and looked at the ground.

"One dollar, monsieur, if you please."

"You miserable leech," I exclaimed, shaking him till he rattled, "you will get no dollar."

"But a cigarette then, is it not so?" Even after the handling I had given him he could bargain.

"Tell your news, then we shall see."

Well, it appeared that Jean and Pilon had that morning got into a squabble over the subject of myself and become angry. Pilon, the joker, had let a boom swing on Jean as the latter stooped over his boat in launching it. Pilon denied all intent to commit harm, maintaining the event was an accident, but Jean's back was injured and his ribs

splintered so they stuck into his lungs like bristles in a pig's back (so related Esper), and he had groaned out that he wished to see me. Now, would we go to my house and get cigarettes?

"Cigarettes, no. I go to Jean," I answered.

The outrage committed by Pilon made my blood boil. Of all persons in Lavouche none held so great a place in my affections as this boyhood friend, Jean, and now he had been basely injured, perhaps crippled for life, by that ruffian Pilon. How long Lavouche would tolerate the latter and his companions I did not know, but if it lay in my power they should immediately be driven from the village. Further, a surgeon should be sent for at once; I should dispatch a messenger immediately to the railway station with a telegram for one at St. John or Portland. Jean injured, perhaps dying! I hurried on up the path and into the wood, Esper pattering behind me. While I had been so happy, my good friend lay suffering. It seemed too dreadful that the finest young man of them all, so tall and straight and strong and honest, should be sacrificed by a trick, by the treacherous blow of such a scoundrel as Pilon.

When we came to the street, it was quiet, empty. I knew the philosophical mind of the village in the matter of receiving accidents as in accepting drownings; such were the acts of God, they believed, therefore the folk continued to fish. After carrying Jean up to his house, leaving one or two persons



to render what assistance they could, and one to make sail down the coast for a doctor, the rest of the men would go about their regular duties of beating out to the seining grounds. All was singularly peaceful as we advanced; old Gaspard worked in his shop over a boat, with bent head; at a door played two children; madame at the inn-window sat with gaze apparently fixed on her moving needles.

Suddenly Esper plucked me by the elbow. I stopped.

"They have taken him in here. There is room and a table on which he can lie while the bones are picked out of his liver."

"Pilon's house?"

"To be sure. At this place he was seized with great agony and could be moved no further."

Ah, that was it! A queer twist of irony, in truth, that he should lie in the house of the man who had wrought his hurt.

I stepped upon the doorsill. The door stood half open and I could see into the room.

"Enter, monsieur, enter," said Esper, gently pressing me with his hand.

The room was empty. Nowhere was there a table, or men, or Jean wounded and in pain. Surprised, I gazed at the open door—it was a solid door, studded with heavy nail heads as I had before often noted. Flashed into my mind the warning of Margot, *Beware strange doors!* But before I could

a curse and a kick administered, and I was half led, half dragged up the stair, along the upper floor, up a second flight of steps, and into what I knew must be the upper story. There I was thrust upon a stool. All the while I kept silent; indeed, it was only by an effort that I could gain my breath and keep from stifling in the foul folds of the blanket. Afterwards, while I was held in a rigid position, the rope was readjusted so as to bind me to my seat, then the blanket was jerked off my head.

Pilon and Esper and Descarte stood before me, disheveled, sweating, and still breathing heavily from their exertions. A deep scratch furrowed one of Descarte's cheeks where I had shut my hand on it and worked minor damages; he wiped the dripping blood with a rag, shooting wicked glances my way and muttering to himself. Esper wore his furtive, flickering smile and showed least effect of the contest, for he it was who had hung on my back and thus remained out of the chief current of the struggle. The leader, Pilon, stood in front; he rested his hands on his hips, panting and for the moment beyond speech.

"*Mon Dieu!* That was a merry dance," Esper remarked airily. "My compliments, comrade, but it was hopeless, eh? You should have taken the matter calmly. Observe, you do not look exactly like a gentleman now."

I dare say I must have looked a ruffian. Perspiration streamed down my face, washing rivulets

through the dust on my cheeks; my hair stood every way, and my clothes were in a state of high disorder — collar rumpled, tie gone, coat ripped; but I had the satisfaction of perceiving that while I had suffered in appearances Pilon and Descarte had also paid good toll.

This was small comfort however. I was a prisoner — beware of strange doors indeed! I had walked neatly into the trap which had been set for me, come like a bird to the snare. Of all doors in Lavouche to hold danger for me, there was none save this of Pilon's house; I should have known that. And Del Hervalle's plot was forward at last. Where I might be on the morrow was a thought from which I shrank; I was in the power of my enemies — my life was in jeopardy.

I looked about my prison. The room was, as I have stated, the third and uppermost story of the house, indeed a sort of attic. High at the peak, the sloping sides of the roof descended to within two feet of the floor before joining the walls; a decrepit and weather-worn roof, of which the beams had fallen into decay and sagged inward; holes were in it, and here and there I could see bits of the outside sunlight, while shining patches and bars dropped downward like yellow lances into the dusty interior. In the slope of roof which faced towards the street there were two dormer windows, but these had been roughly boarded up to the level of a man's eyes, evidently in preparation for my occupancy,

and in consequence the light throughout the room was dim. A stone chimney ran up one wall; for furniture there were a couple of stools, besides mine, and in one corner a musty pallet which apparently had lain there a long time. Not a cheerful room.

Pilon moved towards the door.

"Come, we will go," he said. "This job is finished."

But Esper halted him.

"Are not our throats dusty?" he asked. "Are they not dry as Sahara? Since I attached myself to the person of Monsieur Woodworth I have discovered him to be a thoughtful and generous patron. Would it not be well to drink a cup of wine to his good health?"

He looked slyly at his leader, who burst into laughter and turned about.

"Thou weasel! Make speed and search him."

With a request for my pardon and again a double pardon Esper tapped my pockets and introduced his fingers into their interior with all the deftness of a pickpocket, in which capacity he had evidently long before made himself proficient. Little reward for him, a dollar or two, a few quarters; there was seldom occasion in Lavouche to carry any considerable amount of money. He sucked his lips in disappointment.

"And after the service I rendered you, monsieur?" he reproached.

"Fetch it, it is enough," Pilon said.

Esper ran his eyes over me. He had an inspiration. A small gold chain, now hanging broken from my waistcoat pocket, attracted his favor and aroused his avarice.

"Ah, this I will keep to remember our pleasant acquaintance," remarked he, extracting my watch.

It was a good watch, indeed a valuable watch, which I had purchased in Switzerland, a perfect time-keeper, slim and light and with my monogram in jewels upon the back.

A great joy lighted Esper's face. "Oh, so kind a monsieur!" he exclaimed.

Pilon thrust out his hand gluttonously. "Give it here, quick!"

Esper drew back, clutching his spoil. An evil, desperate rage distorted his face; he spat out a stream of foul biting curses. Pilon advanced a step, lifting his heavy fist, while Descarte, who all the while had been busying himself staunching his wound and leaving conversation to the others, dropped his rag and joined the leader.

"It is as monsieur said," my erstwhile little body-guard snapped, "you drink all the cream. See, I found it; I will keep it."

Descarte spoke. "What one finds, all find. We will sell it and divide."

"Yes, we will divide," Pilon added.

But Esper had the watch in his hand, his rat-like eyes darted from one to the other of the

men, his long sharp nose was twisted more than ever on one side in access of spite. He did not answer.

"Thou pig, give it to Pilon," Descarte said harshly.

He was not a pleasant man to look at, this Descarte, sullen, brutal; he had none of diminutive Esper's redeeming wit or Pilon's braggadocio. A black close-cropped beard covered his face; he was swarthy, slow, savage, and wore a brass ring in his left ear. The pair of them crowded in on their small mate as they talked, forcing him to give way before their advance; there was a method in their movements as well as in their argument. I saw them exchange a rapid glance of understanding, of agreement, and they pressed him step by step until he stood with his back against the wall in the corner by the chimney.

"We will divide, Esper," Pilon repeated.

For answer Esper produced a knife and held it ready. Calmly the two before him likewise drew weapons. The little man waited with twitching face, his old smile coming and going upon his lips; he was outnumbered and they had harried him into the angle as dogs harry a cat. Nothing was spoken. The old room under the sagging roof seemed filled with a sudden hush. Then the imminent tragedy evaporated as mist does on sea. Esper put away his knife; Pilon and Descarte slipped theirs out of sight.

"We shall divide," said Esper quietly, and he handed the watch to Pilon.

The latter looked at Descarte, smiling; Descarte grinned back at Pilon in return. A flash of fury for an instant lighted their victim's face as he perceived the exchange, then it was gone and he appeared impassive.

"Bravo, my little Esper," Pilon said, dropping the watch into his pocket and patting the little man upon the shoulder. "Thou art as generous of milk as a fat wench," with which Rabelaisian jest he again patted Esper. "We will divide and meanwhile drink a glass of cognac." He strode to me. "Ho, is a son of a dog to look on with eyes open at our little family matters? Shut them hereafter, thou!" And he dealt me a blow upon the side of the head that made my cranium ache.

And the three of them went out of the room, locking the door after them.

I now had full leisure for meditation. The peril in which I stood — for peril it was, though I was left to guess what particular form it would later assume — was too plain to be ignored. To cajole myself with false hopes, to say that my captors dare not do me bodily injury, that they must eventually set me free, would have been the height of stupidity. What if this were simple Lavouche! What if it were on the civilized coast of Maine! Is crime less frequent to-day than yesterday, or does it choose the spot? Del Hervalle would no more take account

of the village Lavouche than he would of a passing cloud; if he had determined to put me out of the way, he would do so here with as little impunity as he would in the heart of a desert.

What a cold-blooded, determined, complacent villain he was! Remorse he had none, conscience he had none; but all the qualities of subtlety, persistence, patience, coolness, cunning, expedience, resourcefulness, ingenuity, and daring — all these he had in abundance. Could a person have spread open the book of his life and turned it leaf by leaf, scanned it page by page, marked each dark paragraph, what a record of crime it would have made! Even the small knowledge which I had of him showed the man always to be dealing in evil. At Forge he had flitted about like a vampire, carrying death; in Venezuela who could tell what sins were his; and now here on the coast of Maine he had turned this quiet little isle into an island of contention. Blood had always marked his footsteps — would he depart leaving this island rock thus similarly stained? Del Hervalle — D'Urville — whoever he rightfully was, would Heaven allow him to perpetrate yet another infamous deed and to go his way undiscovered and unpunished? I began to think so. More, I began to think that apparently I was to afford him the opportunity of keeping his hand in practice while on his holiday.

Escape from the attic seemed out of the question. The rope with which I was bound was of



stout manila, weathered and brine-soaked; its makers would have been astonished, no doubt, had they known to what use it was being put. It was wrapped about me in a score of turns, binding my arms firm against my sides and my legs to the rounds of the chair; but even if I had been free I would still have found it difficult to make my way out of the house. The door was without panels, constructed of oak boards running straight up and down in a plain, stout, good old-fashioned way. To be sure, I might have forced a passage through a window, or by several lusty kicks burst a hole through the roof, but in either case it would have been to coast over the eave to a drop upon the pavement below. And Señor Del Hervalle would have raised no objection to that.

Of these things I thought and of many others during the subsequent hours. My arms ached from their cinctures and my spine from its rigid position, while my mind grew weary. A dim room and a blank wall, a tottery roof and two squat stools for companions, may be interesting under certain circumstances or for a limited period of time — I had in addition the prospect of a near and exciting demise; but of the former I quickly tired, and even of speculating upon what form or at what time or in what particular place and with what interesting sufferings death may be accompanied, one may become bored.

Pardon it was who finally unlocked the door. He

had been drinking much of madame's brandy purchased with my money, and was not inclined, also at my expense, to be merry.

"Aha, monsieur, what a pity that you cannot go and paint again the little boat!" he cried, throwing himself upon a stool. "You're not so busy to-day and you now have time to listen to Pilon."

"Have you wrung the water out of your clothes yet?" I inquired politely.

He gave an upward flirt of his moustache.

"They are much drier, even without wringing, than yours will be presently, my little man. You are fresh, too fresh, for a mackerel who has been nicely haled in the net. Therefore I have been considering while I sat over my petit cognac, considering how Pilon might remove the freshness." He fixed his bloodshot eyes upon me with an air of wisdom. "What is it we fishermen do with the mackerel we catch, the nice fat mackerel that we want to keep? Lavouche is famous for its mackerel, and therefore when we have the most famous fresh mackerel of all we must be very careful to keep him from spoiling. Answer Pilon, little man, and tell him what it is the fishermen do?" As I made no reply, he continued, lifting one hand and spreading his sunburnt fingers: "First, they take the fish and hold it so, between thumb and finger, under the gills, yes. Then they take a sharp knife and with a single stroke they slit the belly and clean it, behold, quickly as fishermen know how —

Oh, *Sacré Dieu*, what a jest it is, this for Pilon!" He leaned back, roaring with laughter. "And then they put the good fish in brine to keep, if necessary for many years."

"Is that intended as a parable?" I asked.

He paused, surprised. "That parable, what is that, monsieur?"

"A story intended to point a moral."

A smile of understanding broke over his face.

"You are an intelligent mackerel," said he.

"And when will this event occur?"

"We shall have the honor of conducting you into pickle to-night."

"Señor Del Hervalle will leave it in your hands, I presume?"

His brows went up with a simulated air of not catching my meaning.

"Señor Del Hervalle?"

"The little gentleman who called on you a couple of days ago."

"Señor Del Hervalle — a visit here, how droll!"

"Very," said I dryly.

"Pilon will do what is necessary," said he.

There was little to expect from him in the way of mercy. Now if it had been Esper! For Esper was a fellow who had a proper understanding of the value of money, as I had discovered. Pilon, on the contrary, while avaricious was vain, and in this particular business he fed his vanity by believing himself my master. Moreover he hated me; the desire

for revenge for the insult I had heaped on him was strong; added to this was a natural strain of brutality, a love of cruelty; and altogether I had not much of compassion to hope for from the man.

Presently he resumed his satirical monologue. It was very unfortunate, very unfortunate, he explained, that I could have no dinner, neither supper, for fasting is necessary to prepare the spirit for its long journey to Heaven. Did not priests and monks fast even once a week for the benefit of their souls? And they did not grow thin, not they, they were as fat as capons; it was desirable that I should imitate the priests; and with an irreverent leer he rose to his feet. He however must eat, he and Descarte and Esper, for though they were not going on any journey except a little way out to sea that night and afterwards back to Lavouche, nevertheless since that was a journey on this earth and not to Heaven food was needed for their insides as fuel is needed for engines or wind for sails.

So saying, he stretched his arms above his head and yawned. Then he approached to examine my bonds.

"Be not too lively, my mackerel, while Pilon is gone," he said, giving me a playful cuff.

When he had departed, I digested, in lieu of dinner, the information which he had conveyed. I did not like the nature of the food; it had a bad taste, and as I recalled his vivid description of the fishermen preparing a mackerel for brine a shiver

length of time I could sustain myself in the delicate position demanded. Lavouche is not a bustling village; in fact, it is during the middle of the day notably quiet; and for the most part I had the opposite dwelling, whose dormer window stared steadfastly at me, as my sole reward.

It was the sound of the key turning in the lock that brought me back with a start. Hurriedly I moved a few steps from the window, for I would not have them suspect my occupation.

Señor Del Hervalle entered and came forward.

"And now for a little conversation, monsieur," he said without preliminaries.

"At your service," I answered ironically.

"I wish to discuss the subject of the map." He moved briskly across the room and brought forward a stool—I had already assumed my sitting position without volition. "We have had a difference of opinion, Monsieur Woodworth, as to the ownership of this document. You are a young man of intelligence; it should not be necessary to point out to you that my equity in the same was prior to any which you may have acquired."

"Because of partnership with Frederick Douglass?" I scoffed.

"Said I not that you had intelligence? It's not necessary for us to go into the circumstances surrounding the manner in which that chart came into your possession. Enough that we both know them. You have no title to it."

"When did you become so particular as to titles, Monsieur D'Urville?" I asked. "So far as I could ever infer from your conduct, possession was the only title you recognized."

He smiled, spread the tails of his frock coat carefully over his knees, while he rested his silk hat upon his lap. What light there was shone full upon his face and gave me a full view of his features. As ever, they were placid; his little eyes twinkled brightly, his round forehead running into the baldness of his head was smooth and unfurrowed by any lines of anxiety; his beard black and shiny — as was his moustache that was waxed to needle points — had been newly and closely cropped to its point on the chin.

"Come, monsieur, we'll put aside merely pleasant conversation and talk plain business," said he.

"Señor, you have me at a disadvantage. I'm perhaps intelligent as you say, but this rope stops the circulation in my limbs and dulls my brain. To talk business one should have a clear mind; loosen the rope and you will perceive an astonishing brilliancy in my ideas."

The complacent smile grew upon his face.

"Ah, but no, my Charles. I fear the brilliancy would extend to acts."

"Well, what do you want?" I asked shortly.

"The map, *mon ami*."

"Get it, then."

"That I will do — if I must. But let us see if

there be not a pleasanter way. As you know, I am about to bid my good friends at Moore House farewell the day after to-morrow or the day following that. Let us part in good will, you and I. Give me the map in which you have no interest, knowing not even the name of the fortress or in what country it is situated, and agree to say nothing of it or of this affair or of a certain Monsieur D'Urville, and all will be arranged agreeably between us. Good Pilon will row you upon the water to fish a day or two until I have departed. Thus you will amuse yourself and this matter will be settled."

"And would I return to Lavouche?"

He spread his hands wide in an expressive gesture.

"But why not, Charles?"

"Yes, why not? Pilon has a knife, and so have Descarte and Esper knives. Señor, it would be very easy to speak a little word in Pilon's round ear, and then — plump! Charles would dive to the bottom like a fish. Indeed, my dear Señor Del Hervalle — D'Urville, I'm laboring under the delusion that the word is already spoken."

Drawing forth a case, he removed two cigarettes, placed one to my lips and lighted it, and then served himself. In little attentions the Señor was all that could be desired; it was only in larger ones that his zeal might prove fatal.

"To be frank with you, my good Charles," he said a little sadly, "I fear the word has been spoken

to Pilon, and Pilon is a ready fellow. For some hundred dollars he will do much; indeed, for that sum he would eat his soul if he could find it."

"A hundred dollars, cheap enough."

"Is it not?"

"Still you might have saved the money," I said. "You are very skillful as a murderer yourself, Señor. I recall Forge, for instance."

He puffed his cigarette critically.

"Not particularly skillful, those executions, but necessary. Besides, to-day it is different. Behold, I am an envoy, a man of position."

Well, there was something to be said for that; an envoy and particular friend of a president, even of President Castro, has, I suppose, certain proprieties to observe. It would not look well to engage in murder; envoys and other public men must depend much upon favorable impressions, and exception might be taken by sensitive persons to blood on the official frock. I recognized his position and the obligations it carried; I went farther and remarked that I was charmed by his consideration.

But said I, "I can't see my way clear to deliver the map."

"It's not the map so much," he replied frankly, "but it is yourself, my friend, that concerns me and makes this step imperative. Perceive, I am the intimate of Castro, I'm the friend of Monsieur Moore, I have a future which has only begun. Do you think that I care for Venezuela? Bah! it is a



dungheap of peons. I now have wealth; brains I have always had. A year more to consummate my plans, and then I shall return to France, and there, no longer D'Urville, no longer Del Hervalle, but" — he dramatically tapped his breast — "my real self, I shall become famous. What will money not accomplish? What will brains not contrive? Ten years — five — and you will behold me rule France — rule Europe!"

He stopped, staring past me into an unknown and unimagined world. Not cunning schemes were the sole food of his mind; like other human beings, he had dreams of fame and greatness. The impenetrable mask in which he wrapped himself had been dropped for a moment and I had been allowed to see his audacious soul. He would mount to the top of a great people, he would set his hand on the destinies of nations. What a dream! How petty seemed the strivings of his former partner in crime, Douglass! How insignificant were Forge and Lavouche before the face of such an ambition! And I, Charles Woodworth, had pitted myself against that seething brain and vast ambition! I had thought he sought a map, when he burned for an empire!

He flung away his cigarette.

"I fear you'll see nothing of reason," he continued. "You are one of the blocks, one of the little things, I must kick out of my way; you chanced to be the fool who stumbled into Forge and

saw me there. Therefore I must remove you. You'll not give me the map — very well. I will see if I cannot persuade your servant to hand it to me before I leave Lavouche. It is not necessary to my plans, but it will be useful." He arose and shook out his coat-tails. "I leave you to your reflections. By reflection one gains wisdom and sometimes consolation. The latter I especially recommend to you now. Until this evening then, my dear Charles." With which farewell he went briskly out.

The personality of the man remained with me, seemed still to fill the spaces of the room. I had sat with a great man, though a ruthless. Memory of his little figure was forgotten; there remained but the boundless scope of his conception. As I looked around me, however, at the walls and roof and floor, common sense reasserted itself. Five hundred years earlier he could have triumphed; for his was the mind of a Mazarin, of a Machiavelli. But crimes were not the rungs by which men rose to power in this day and age of the world.

And what of Charles Woodworth, the little block he was about to kick out of the way? That, after all, was the important matter to me, not fame and empires. The afternoon was waning — it was now near six. If I were to do anything to save myself from ending my career in the manner of the mackerel which Pilon had taken pains to describe, I had best be at it. I glanced about the room; my eyes fell on one of the stools. With it I could stand

full above the board that barred the lower part of the window; but to what purpose, unless to save toes? Suddenly inspiration fell upon me like a white light; should mere glass stand between me and a shout for help? Quickly I rose, went to a stool and began to kick it along the floor. It tumbled and rolled, but I knocked it forward until it stopped under the window, where I painfully bent over and set it right, after which I mounted. The window was composed of six panes; the space between the edge of the board and the top of the frame was some twelve inches. Between these I inserted my head, crown against one of the panes, and pushed. Snap went the glass, whereupon in rushed a gust of fresh air and I heard the smash on the pavement below. The street was empty, no one was in sight. Wait until a man shows up, said I to myself, then I shall use the voice God has given me!

Such are the vain imaginings of men. I did not shout when the first man appeared, nor when the second came into view, nay, not even when marched forth a third. For of all the hundred-odd moving, breathing human beings who might have opened a door and walked out, it had to be my three atrocious scoundrels, Pilon and Descarte and Esper. They stepped from the inn and advanced to the door of their own dwelling. Would they see the glass which sprinkled the pavement? Did they do so, would they ascribe to it any connection with the prisoner

whom they had locked in the attic above? At the door they paused.

Pilon sniffed the air.

"There is fog coming—or rain," he said. "That is good. We'll not have so far to go out upon the water."

"We will tie a stone to his feet," Descarte remarked.

"No, that is not well. Let the current carry him," Pilon answered. Esper did not join in the talk. Perhaps he was thinking of the watch with the flashing jewels embedded in its case.

Would they never go in? With my head half out the window I hung over them in a spell of terrible fascination, suffering all the agony of a gambler who has staked his last handful of gold coins in a final desperate coup and watches the little marble spin about the wheel before his eyes. God knows it was my final coup! If the fragments of glass were discovered, or if the trio ascended and entered my attic before any other man stood in the street, I would never find the chance to shout an alarm. They smoked and loafed and dawdled; they discussed the disposal of my person as indifferently as if I had been a lump of carrion.

"O, la!" yawned Pilon. "We should be back by midnight." And he refilled his pipe.

"Unless these pigs of fishermen go to bed late or we have to row far," Descarte growled. "What about some brandy?"

"We'll carry a flask to keep us warm."

"Good."

In the intensity of excitement that prevailed over me I had now got my head wholly out of the hole in the window. So invisible was all Lavouche, with the exception of my three jailers, that it might have been a village of the dead — and even these three were discussing death. Yet it was the most natural thing in the world, for it was supper-time; smoke drifted from chimneys and I could smell fish and onions frying. But to my imagination, inflamed by the prospect of being kept captive, by the possible discovery and estoppel of my one means of communication, and the eventual dismissal of my person into the sea, there seemed in the fact of the street's emptiness a conspiracy of evil powers.

The men continued to talk and idle and breathe the evening. Esper joined the conversation.

"This fellow now, we should keep him a week and squeeze him dry," he said, rubbing his long nose. "There's money to be wrung out of his clothes."

Pilon twirled his moustache. "Explain the joke, my little Esper."

"He is an orange. Yesterday he gave up three drops of juice for a single question — three dollars. He is too rich to dump all at once into the gutter."

"Rogue, and you kept them?" Pilon shouted. "Without dividing?"

"Nay, I kept not the dollars, I spent them."

"Worse, thou son of a dog of a cow! Pilon will remember."

Esper shrugged his shoulders. "Thou wouldst have a long memory, then, if thou remembered all the dollars thou thyself hast spent and not divided."

How further their dispute ran I do not know. A figure had appeared at the lower end of the street, a man carrying a hand-bag, who stopped and looked one way and then another hesitating, who seemed doubtful. Something familiar about him made me lick my lips with expectation. Let him turn up the street and I was saved, whoever he might be.

He remained between two minds, and while he decided I ceased to breathe. Then suddenly he faced towards the village and came on. Now let my three murderers talk and idle and enjoy the air! I looked down upon them grimly, as I verily believed a Higher Eye than mine was gazing down; Pilon was talking, Descarte was listening, but Esper, hands in trousers pockets, was casting a bored and random glance over the pavement. He moved a step and bent over.

"Hola, who has been flinging windows about!" he exclaimed.

A horrible fear and dreadful rage swelled in my heart. Esper — Esper to whom I had given three dollars — was to rob me of my last hope of rescue and life. The unknown man was too far away to be of use, but he was coming steadily. I recog-

nized him, Billy Harrington, coming like a champion to the lists, though he knew it not!

"Glass comes from a window, a window from a house," said Esper sagely.

He examined the first story, likewise did Pilon and Descarte; he examined the windows of the second, their eyes were lifted with his. Death seemed already to be stretching out its hand and touching me, for my body was numbed with a sort of *ante-rigor mortis*; only my eyes were capable of sensible movement, and they gazed down in a horrible ecstasy of expectation. And then three other pairs of eyes rose and met mine. What sort of a face they saw, I do not know; with hair disheveled, skin begrimed, cheek besmeared with blood from a glass cut on my temple, I can only imagine it must have been something grotesque, as are those of gargoyles on cathedrals of a French town. For the three men stared upward in blank amazement.

Then Pilon exploded with a curse. He sprang to the door and vanished within; Descarte hung for a moment in bewilderment, but followed; I knew they were hurling themselves up the stairs. Esper alone remained. He set his hands on his hips, head back, and surveyed me with his twitching smile.

"Is it you then, Monsieur Orange?" he said. "Come, this is droll."

Droll it might have been to him, to me it was desperate. I burst into a shout.

"Billy — Billy Harrington!"

He stopped like a shot at hearing his name. Fifty feet away, it seemed to him to come from anywhere — my disembodied voice, as he afterwards related, falling from anywhere. Behind me the door was thrown open, the room filled with the sound of pounding feet. I uttered a final yell to Billy, a yell for help, a cry full of demand, of compelling urgency, of fierce despair. Then hands seized me, my head was wrenched back into the room, my body jerked off the stool, and amid curses and savage imprecations I was hauled to the opposite end of the attic, where my captors thrust me down in my seat against the wall. Pilon, breathing hard from his race up two flights of stairs, towered over me like a bull.

"Imbecile, you would rob us of the money we strive to earn?" he shouted at me angrily.

I had flung dice and lost; I had done my best, but Fate was too strong for me. Billy too had done the best he could on such short notice. He had looked about in every direction save the right one; how could he be expected in a strange village to turn on the instant to a remote and disreputable head sticking out of a third-story attic window? It was destiny that held me here, not Pilon. My bitter disappointment ceased and fatalism succeeded. A sardonic merriment filled my heart.

"Can't a hungry man call for his supper?" I asked.



## CHAPTER XIII

### ONE WAY TO ENGAGE A VALET

Thereafter I had a guard. While Pilon and Esper went down into the inn for their supper, Descarte remained, a man who by nature was surly, sullen, silent, lowering, and begrimed. He sat on a stool in the middle of the room, smoking a short, black clay pipe and between puffs spat on the floor. Now and again he would turn his eyes on me indifferently; and the only emotion he displayed was towards the last, when he was overtaken by impatience to have his supper. Growling and muttering through his beard, he heaped imprecations upon Esper, who was to relieve him. Half-past seven had however passed before the latter came; Descarte, shoving his pipe into a jacket pocket, disappeared without a word.

Esper was one of those alert little fellows to whom talk was as essential as food or air; so, drawing forward the stool which his mate had just relinquished, he proceeded to engage in conversation.

"That was a good trick, that, eh?" he remarked, nodding backward over his shoulder. "You nearly sewed up the sow's ear that time, monsieur, and your little servant Esper found it necessary to invent a tale for the stranger who wished to know who was

calling his name along the street. A very impertinent gentleman, that, even to the shaking of my shoulder. But the noise was only made by the drunken dog of a Pilon, I explained, bellowing in his drunkenness. *Hein*, the stranger departed not well satisfied and without giving a *pourboire* for the information. Not a jolly, liberal gentleman like you, my master." And he grinned facetiously.

"My liberality is about to be cut off," I returned.

"That is true." He became thoughtful.

"You might have squeezed many a dollar out of me, you little rogue."

"Ah, yes." He grew even more thoughtful.

"We could have had pleasant days together, you and I, Esper?"

"It is that Pilon, *mon Dieu*, who would throw away the orange?" he remarked in an impatient tone.

Of the three scoundrels who were my keepers it was easy to perceive that Esper had the brains. That I was to be dumped into the sea without being drained of more money vexed him, that was plain; it was folly thus to cast a pleasant source of revenue away; perhaps for a week, two weeks, I might according to his calculations have been played upon to yield up some dollars each day. How much more sensible! I put his own thoughts to him and inquired if it were not so.

"But yes," he said shortly.

"Well, Pilon is probably satisfied with the gain

of my watch," I continued. "It will bring him considerable money, furnish him with more than one keg of brandy."

The flickering smile came and went over his face, but his eyes were angry. He knew and I knew that he should share in none of the proceeds, though Pilon might condescend to dole Descarte a recompense for his loyalty and assistance.

"Pilon cries loudly to divide," I said. "Does he ever divide when he finds an orange?"

"He would divide a dead herring, no more."

"That watch was worth a good bit of money." He looked up with interest. "How much do you think, Esper?"

He considered.

"Fifty dollars — possibly seventy-five."

"You had but a glance before Pilon shut his fingers on it. Your figure is low."

"If it is not impolite to make inquiry, monsieur, what was the cost of the instrument?"

"Five hundred dollars."

The furtive smile froze on his lips. For a minute he sat immovable, one corner of his mouth higher than the other, his nose twisted around; his face might have been a caricature. Then he sprang up.

"*Nom d'un chien de la cochon* — oh, that damned Pilon, may he burn on needles in hell!" And he poured out a stream of vehement, biting oaths and curses, scum of the gutter, filth of the sewer, terrible in their foulness and horrible in their conception.

Had my hands been free, I should have clapped them to my ears. As it was, I was compelled to listen. I had heard cowboys and sea-captains when profane under excitement, but what they could say was as milk to vitriol in comparison with what flowed and spattered from Esper's tongue. Then he stopped abruptly and said with sudden quietness: "Five hundred — it is a fortune! I may yet possibly have to spit Pilon on a knife, oh, the robber! Monsieur, five hundred dollars is a great deal to give for only a watch. I have never had the honor of possessing such a watch to tell the time of day by. It must be very fine, yes. Have you many such watches, monsieur?"

His interest was polite but nevertheless sincere. I had to confess that I had not many, in fact, only the one — and that I no longer possessed. A man does not usually go about with a dozen watches, I pointed out to him, unless he be a jeweler or perhaps a collector.

"Ah, that! I have been a collector of watches," he said with a flash of wit, "but of such watches as this, no indeed, but only of poor watches, which it was necessary to present to *le oncle* when I was thirsty. But yours, master, is a grand watch, a famous watch. Will you have need of a quick and faithful valet hereafter?"

"Not unless he be a good swimmer."

Esper received the jest smiling. "I had forgotten that affair."

"How much are you to receive as your share of to-night's work?" I asked.

"*Peste!* Ten dollars. It is little."

"To put a rope around your neck, very little."

Now, if ever, here was my chance to gain an ally. He smoked and smiled his flickering smile in high dissatisfaction with his comrade's cupidity; the watch he had lost, the pay for his service in assisting to murder me was ridiculously low; altogether he was coming out of the affair badly, very badly for one of his wit. He smiled and smoked and frowned and was displeased. Because he was thinking deeply, the tip of his nose needed much scratching. He loved money and he would get but an insignificant handful of *sous*; he loved watches and he had been robbed of a magnificent one; it was exasperating, it was diabolical, it was enough to make one stick a knife into that son of a dog of a Pilon.

"*Nom de Dieu,*" he would say occasionally, "*Nom de Dieu.*"

At last a brilliant thought struck him. He swung about to face me.

"Fool that I am, you are a gentleman, you have money."

"I have some money," I admitted.

"Perhaps you could buy such another watch?"

"It is not unlikely."

"Possibly you are wealthy."

"Possibly."

"I have been a valet, monsieur."

"Eh?"

"Of a truth — to a gentleman in Bordeaux. I could present you with excellent references were Monsieur Cardinac living, but unfortunately he is dead. He died suddenly without the thoughtfulness to provide me with them."

I did not inquire into the nature of Monsieur Cardinac's sudden demise, nor did I wish a valet, least of all such a one as Esper. But the idea had taken hold upon his mind; he went into details of his service and described the manner in which his former employer was shaved, clothed, and fed.

"Which would you prefer," I asked, "to be a valet or to have five hundred dollars cash?"

"Both," he answered without hesitation.

"There are good pickings, I suppose, in service?"

"Eh? Sometimes."

"I will give you five hundred dollars to free me."

His eyes flashed, then narrowed. "It is a risk — five hundred is little."

"It is much."

"Something — but not equal to the position of valet."

"I don't want you for a servant."

Surprise grew on his dirty face. "But yes. Did I not please you yesterday?"

I laughed. Villainous as I knew him to be, conscienceless as he was, his impudence was captivating.

"You were well enough," I answered. "What you want to be my valet for, I can't imagine."

"Monsieur, observe. I am weary of Pilon and Descarte, who are sons of pigs without wit. You are a good master. You will buy a new watch, you are wealthy. We shall live comfortably together away from the smell of fish."

"I'll give you five hundred dollars to free me, no more."

"Five hundred and the valetship, monsieur."

"No."

"Pardon, but yes."

On his twitching, smiling face I saw a look of determination. A great idea had come to him. As D'Urville dreamed of empires, so Esper now dreamed of a service where there would be many fine opportunities for sly pilfering. Esper my valet! It was absurd, ridiculous, and yet to him it was anything but absurd and ridiculous; he had me at a disadvantage and could press his demand, and he knew — shrewd, rascally mind! — that he dealt with a man of honor. My word once passed, it would not be broken. Then I grew grave. It was not a laughing matter. My life was in the fellow's hands; he could dictate, and life, even with such a valet, were better than death in the water.

"I will make it a thousand," I offered.

For an instant he hesitated. But imagination had poured its magic fluid into his mind; he beheld splendid visions of purloined stick pins, coins, cigars,

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wines, even jewels; he had caught a vision of an Aladdin's cave.

"No, the five hundred and the other."

"You little shrimp, you wry-faced scoundrel!" I exclaimed.

"Ha, that is like Monsieur Cardinac now," he answered with admiration. "Monsieur Cardinac was a witty gentleman — you too will be a pleasant master to serve."

Such imperturbability was beyond further attack. As for him he had gone off on another line of thought.

"That Pilon, what a joke on Pilon it will be! He will twirl his moustache and bawl oaths. Let him. You agree, monsieur?" A hand without pushed the door. "You agree?" he repeated again, anxiously.

Pilon and Descarte entered, and conversation was cut off. Presently Señor Del Hervalles too put in an appearance. He bade me good evening, then turned to the three men and plunged into a discussion of the night's plan, which though carried on without mention of my name was sufficiently clear to convey understanding to my mind. A fog had, it appeared, rolled up over sea and island as had been predicted by Pilon, enveloping the shore, which was not thick enough however to warrant the risk of attempting to bear me captive along the street. Unfortunately for their enterprise the house which we occupied had no rear door, the one which



had originally formed an entrance there having been sealed by a previous householder. Pilon grumbled; we should have to wait another hour at least, for fishermen were still moving here and there at doorways. The envoy interrupted him. In the mean time Pilon, he stated, should make ready a boat; Señor Del Hervalle would go himself with him and afterwards drink a glass of wine by the window in the inn, where he could observe our passing down to the sea; after which he would follow to observe that the boat put off successfully. And Esper looked over his shoulder at me, smiling a question with his crooked smile.

It was no longer a mooted point in my mind of accepting Esper as my *valet-de-chambre*; to that now I would gladly consent to gain my freedom, consent to that and far more. Our talk however and whatever agreements we might enter into on the subject of master and servant would now be waste of breath. There was but an hour left for me to live, during which I would be held a prisoner and guarded with vigilance. Against Pilon and Descarte, what could Esper do, even if he were so minded, to accomplish my release? Pilon had my revolver, Descarte was a powerful creature who would not be stopped from earning his wage. Only on the street or at the boat was it possible that my escape could be effected; at that it would require the killing of Pilon and Descarte and mayhap Señor Del Hervalle, indeed, a piling up of slaughters of

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which little Esper, or any other rascal, might well be proud. But I knew that so vast an enterprise was beyond him.

Del Hervalle and his three rascals talked on. Depression settled upon my mind. Outside was fog, inside the walls despair. Two candles which Pilon had brought awhile before and stuck by their own grease on a stool cast an imperfect light throughout the attic. The room was too big for the feeble beams; in the corners, in the angles of the chimney, in the high peak of the roof, the shadows lurked and lay or jerked and fluttered whenever the briny night air puffed through the hole in the window and started the candle-flames dancing. It was not a pleasant thing to think that I might have been lounging in a big chair before the fireplace in Stag Lodge. A fierce resentment blazed up in my heart against the fate that roped me to a seat in this barren prison. Until I had gone to Forge two years before, where first I met the little fat Frenchman, I had thought the world a dull place. Since then it had proven exciting enough. My acquaintance with the man, and the world too for that matter, would end to-night and whether or not to-morrow would continue to be dull or be exciting I would neither know nor care. I had always been rather fond of the sea, but by daylight; and I had always hoped to have my grave in good solid ground. To imagine oneself washing around in seaweed, with curious fishes staring at one and crabs scuttling among one's ribs

and lobsters playfully tapping one's grinning teeth that cannot eat them — ugh! Then, too, how would Pilon proceed to his task of preparing me for burial? I wondered if he would stand over me as I lay bound in the bottom of the boat, and if before he slit my throat, twirling his moustache he would deliver himself of a number of boastful remarks, which I might take if I wished as Life's Exordium; or would he, being in a hurry to get back to bed and sleep, finish the matter with dispatch? By the time I had fed on these reflections I was in a desperate state of resolve. I would put up a final fight. The rope must need be unwound in order to permit me to walk, for the villains could not conveniently carry, kill, and bury me attached to a chair. The moment of loosing my bonds should be the favorable time. I would fight as never a man fought before; and if they succeeded in taking me to the boat it would be after first picking me a dead man from the boards of the floor.

Señor Del Hervalle advanced to the place where I sat.

"It's extremely sad that so promising a young man must die and you will possibly find it inconvenient, but, alas, such is the world!" He lifted his eyebrows philosophically. "I have just learned that Pilon failed to provide you with either dinner or supper; Pilon is a ruffian, he does not understand the little courtesies which make existence endurable and which are customary among gentlemen. Accept

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my profound regrets, monsieur, it shall never occur again, I assure you." And his eyes twinkled.

"It's not yet too late for me to eat," said I.

"Perhaps, no. But the inn-woman has washed her pans and kettles; she will not cook again until morning. Moreover, we are advised by physicians that it is injudicious to enter water immediately after a meal. Now, my dear Monsieur Charles, if there is anything you wish to say, I am at your service. At the boat we shall be busy; besides, one finds it difficult to listen attentively while shivering with chill of the fog."

I considered for a moment.

"You're very confident," said I gravely, "but when you murder me you're but adding another strand to the rope that will hang you. You think that you'll go to France and become a great man — bah! You'll decorate a gallows-beam. You'll not even get out of America."

He removed his long amber cigarette-holder, flicked an ash, and pursed his lips.

"I am an envoy. Your government will conform to the usages of international custom and courtesy. You speak unadvisedly."

"I speak the truth," I said. "There are five men who know that Señor Del Hervalle was the mechanic D'Urville, the scoundrel and murderer D'Urville of Forge. Five men, I say, any one of whom can and will rip off your mask and hang you."

That my scornful statement impressed him was

evident. For a time he said nothing, while I could imagine his brain clicking busily away like a delicate machine, sorting facts, questions, possibilities.

"Monsieur Maitland — Fenton — " he considered.

"And they're not all. There's a well-known war correspondent who has heard all about you and will look you up — good reading for the public your career will make, Señor. After him there's an American army officer who knows everything that I know and, further, he is aware that you are here on the island of Lavouche. What will be his inference when I disappear? He has friends, high friends in the American government. Explanations will be required. There is a fifth wealthy gentleman of New York, who has a finger on the strings of half a dozen of your petty republics. You do not know him, but he knows you. He has already, without your learning the fact of course, turned his eye in your direction, because it chanced that you had a man shot against a wall whom he had employed on a certain matter. When he turns his attention upon an individual, it is not without a purpose in mind; and when I informed him of the events of Forge and of your identity he was immensely pleased."

"Ah!" said he.

My remarks were certainly interesting him.

"And to go back to Messrs. Fenton and Maitland, they have been placed in possession of the

facts — that you are Señor Del Hervalle, that you are here, and, last and most important, that you have already threatened my life. You are aware that they have millions and, now that they have track of you again, they will spend them if necessary to bring you to justice. An envoy of Venezuela! How much do the nations of the world respect that cut-throat Castro! They will reach a hand forth and drag you by the hair from his little kingdom. A great man of Europe! You will be a little man suspended from a gibbet.”

I had told him some news, that was a satisfaction at any rate, news which would engage his mind for some time to come. The fingers with which he held his cigarette-holder were shaking.

“These are matters I shall meditate,” said he finally.

“You ’ll have much need to.”

For a while longer he stood, then made a gesture as if to dismiss the unpleasant topic from his mind.

“We are far away from our immediate business,” he addressed me. And falling again into his suave irony, “Your appearance is not prepossessing, Monsieur Charles, to enact the chief rôle which is assigned to you.”

“It matters little after one is dead whether he dies clean or dirty, in rags or broadcloth.”

His three hirelings, who all the while had stood silent, listening to what they could but half understand, were in their own depth again; and it was

at this point that Esper, pert and impudent, advanced a pace.

"Possibly monsieur, since his apparel is awry, would wish to employ a valet?" he inquired.

Bursting into a roar of laughter, Pilon smote the speaker on the back with his palm. It was a fine jest! Descarte too grinned his savage grin; even Señor Del Hervalle condescended to beam. Esper, on his part, was smiling his strange, furtive, flickering smile; the candle rays fell on his face and brought out in strong relief of light and shadow the man's lean cheeks, long bent nose, crooked twitching mouth. But he did something more than smile — he made of me a silent, eager, final demand.

I answered him:

"My need for a valet is at present exceeding great. I employ you, Esper."

## CHAPTER XIV

### A STRUGGLE ON THE SANDS

We had struck our bargain, Esper and I. A ray of hope flashed into my breast, but only a faint and struggling ray. How he should outwit these others — for it must be by wit if at all — I had not the faintest conception. Nor did he, I think, at the time have any plan; he would trust to the mind God had given him (so he would have said) and contrive an occasion out of opportunity. Could he do it? The whole matter rested in his grimy little hands.

Pilon departed to make ready the boat, and with him went Señor Del Hervalle. Descarte drew out his pipe and smoked. Esper continued to engage himself with me in pleasant conversation.

“How is it, monsieur, this thing of an ocean to sleep in?” he inquired.

“I’ll be better able to tell you to-morrow,” I answered.

“Truly, yes. There will be big fish and whales to disturb you, however, just as rats come and bite at Descarte when he is drunk.”

The man named turned a scowling countenance upon his frivolous companion.



"*Sacré*, I will beat you for that," he growled.

"Oh, *mon camarade*, no. It is only a little joke, and the rats come only when you are very drunk. I myself have helped to drive them out of your head. But what will you! One cannot enjoy drunkenness and not pay the penny."

"That is true," Descarte agreed.

"So therefore the rats must run."

"I am very dry now," Descarte said.

Esper rose from the stool on which he sat and humming a *chanson* strolled to the window, where he put his head through the broken pane for a while. When he rejoined us, his cheeks were damp with the fine moisture of the fog. He resumed conversation.

"What think you, Descarte, must I as valet follow my master into the sea?"

Descarte showed his yellow teeth in a hideous grin.

"I will help you there if you wish."

"Salt would make me thirsty. There would be much water but no wine. Water is for imbeciles."

"That is true," Descarte admitted, and looked around. "Has the dog of a Pilon left us nothing?"

"Nothing."

Again Esper went to the window and put his head forth. When he returned, he shot a rapid glance at me, rolled himself a cigarette which he lighted at a candle, then rubbed his nose speculatively.

"How deep is the sea, monsieur?"

"Some miles."

"That is very far, a long jump up to come back for some of madame's brandy."

"Perhaps you could find some down yonder in the bottom of the ocean. No doubt there are dozens of barrels rolling around that have spilled out of wrecked ships," I suggested.

"Ah, barrels would be necessary, for I should be very dry indeed with so much salt about."

"Damn Pilon, to leave us no brandy," said Descarte.

"Pilon is a cistern, he drinks it all, my good comrade. But, monsieur, I cannot follow you, I fear. The salt would spoil the barrels when they were opened. *Parbleu*, the thought of so much salt makes my throat stick together. I am very dry."

"And I—I am dry," Descarte said.

"We have nothing to drink."

"*Nom de nom*, nothing."

Esper stood with a forefinger to his nose, his smile coming and going. He looked at Descarte, Descarte scowled at the floor.

"*Tiens!*" Esper suddenly exclaimed.

Descarte looked up. "What?"

"Brandy, a bottle."

"Where?"

"I perceived Pilon to hide so much"—he indicated a bottle half full—"in his long coat."

the oil-skin coat in the room under this. I will fetch it."

Descarte sprang up, seized him by the shoulder, and spun him aside.

"Thief, would you drink it all! I, Descarte, will fetch it." And growling in his beard, he stamped out of the attic.

For an instant Esper harked after him. The door remained open and we could hear the man's feet clumping down the flight of steps to the next floor beneath. Breathlessly I waited. If Esper was to do the business, this was his chosen time. He came quickly to me.

"Listen, monsieur," he said. "I cut the rope, but you must remain without moving. Descarte will not observe. He will return without the brandy, for there is none. Then I shall go down and look. When I too come back, I will cry, 'The prisoner! oh, thou traitor, Descarte! Pilon will wring thy neck for cutting that rope.' That will be the signal, master, for you to spring up. We will follow to catch you, but I will stumble in Descarte's way. Find then a place where your legs will carry you."

With his knife he cut my bonds even as he spoke, leaving them to retain the appearance of being yet unsevered. The release of pressure upon my numbed and aching limbs sent the blood smarting through my arteries; pins and needles filled each finger and toe. But, oh, the joy of that pain! Working my muscles into their normal condition, but gently so

as not to disturb the segments of rope, I gradually restored circulation. Descarte was making a thorough search.

"To resume our discussion, monsieur," Esper said, lighting a fresh cigarette and taking his seat, "all the salt in the sea, where does it come from?"

At this instant I loved the rogue, loved his twisted nose and odd smile. For was I not released, was I not again a free man? Del Hervalle's plot had fallen apart with the rope. Nothing in the world should stop me from going out of this stone house where I had spent long fearful hours. Eagerness bade me leap up, fling myself out into the air, and shout Del Hervalle's villainy to the world; prudence whispered that I might meet Descarte on the stair — and he had on his person a wicked knife. Moreover obligation to the little fellow who had played his part so well held me yet bound by honor to give him the chance he demanded to reflect the guilt of my escape upon Descarte. I might have fled then and there. Esper was only a rascal — but had I not given my word?

"Where does all the salt come from? Out of the earth," I answered.

"Then there is more to come?"

"Yes."

"It will fill up the ocean, *mon Dieu*, until there is no water, only salt."

"Possibly."

He shook his head. "Master, I shall not follow

you into the sea to be dried up hard in salt like a cod-fish in a barrel. No, monsieur, that would be to ask too much, even of a valet."

On the stone steps Descarte's boots sounded clumping up to join us. He wore a face of wrath when he entered.

"Dog, son of a dog, thou drank it!" he snarled.

Esper raised his eyebrows in astonishment.

"I? No, no, my comrade."

"There is no bottle there except an empty one."

"Then Pilon has taken it."

"Thou liest."

"By the Little Mother, no. Stay you, I will look."

Descarte scowled. "If you find it and bring it not here, I shall in truth send you diving after this other dog." And he turned his scowl upon me.

"Ha, jest not," said Esper. "Jest not so seriously, Descarte."

He disappeared in his turn, descending the stair on the mock search. The minute of deliverance was near. Descarte scowled and listened and wrinkled his brow; far were his thoughts from me or my escape, all on a bottle. He was in no mood for jests, yet the one Esper was about to play was an excellent one. I moved my feet a little until I had them placed so as to enable me to make a quick forward spring. And then—and then, what was that I heard? Del Hervalle's voice?

They were ascending the stair together. Evi-

dently the Señor had not been satisfied to sit at madame's inn-window, or perhaps the fog was too thick to permit him to look without. He stepped into the room wiping moisture from his face with a linen handkerchief. Pilon waited at the boat, he was informing Esper, who listened with head on one side; what would the little fellow do? Would he give the signal? Well, none would be needed.

The fingers of my right hand slipped down and closed round a stool leg. I straightened my body a trifle and several of the severed coils slipped away until the ends showed. But none of the three men for the moment perceived what had occurred, for Señor Del Hervalles still talked busily with the pair. He had now arrived in the center of the room just behind Descarte, who continued smoking on his stool, from which he had not moved since his return; Esper however turned his head on one side so that he could hold me in range of vision. Up and down his glance flashed, noting the betraying fragments of rope.

"As valet to Monsieur Charles, I cannot convince myself that it is necessary to follow him into the sea," he said gayly.

"Oh, *mon bon enfant*," smiled Del Hervalles.

Esper shot another glance at me, ran his tongue over his lips. The time for action had at last come. I gripped the chair-leg tighter and leaned forward.

"The service of a valet —" he stated, then dramatically clutching the envoy's arm, exclaimed,

"Look, Señor, look! The prisoner! Thou dog, Descarte, to cut him loose — traitor, stinking pig — "

What more he cried I never heard. Up I sprang and swinging the stool in a great circle flung it at Descarte's head. Then I jumped for the door. The man at whom I had aimed the heavy missile ducked his head and body, falling over on one knee against the seat whereon stood the two candles, knocking them in a sputter upon the floor, while the stool passed on, striking Del Hervalles full in the breast and hurling him prostrate. That much I saw before the light suddenly diminished to the little halo of radiance which lay round the flames burning on the boards. Out I went, followed by a cry from Del Hervalles for the men to pursue me.

I took the first stair by great leaps. A lighted lantern hung from a hook on the landing beneath, spreading from its dingy panes a few feeble rays. As I came under it, I cast a swift glance up the steps behind me; Descarte was already out of the room, jumping downward like a mad bull and carrying a knife in his hand. Esper was close at his heels. Two steps and I was at the top of the lower stair, down which I plunged. In the room below was darkness. My recollection of the spot where opened the door and where hung its latch was vague; I had to halt and fumble for the latter. Almost Descarte reached me as I finally pulled it open and burst out of the dreadful house.





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The fog was not so thick but what the moon, now risen a little way above the wood and cliff of rock, diffused the night with a pale and luminous glow. It was as if the street were filled with a mysterious golden haze. The walls of the opposite houses loomed dark; objects could be seen only as vague shapes; and into this strange vapor-filled canyon of the street down which the moon shone I and my two pursuers fled. That there was fog I had forgotten; it enveloped me with a sudden surprise. Emotions however were out of place now, it was a time for legs. Behind me not ten feet I heard the footfalls of Descarte and Esper. From Esper I had nothing to fear, but from the scoundrel who ran at his side I had everything to dread, for did he once get in reach of me he would not hesitate to plunge his knife into my back. Down the empty foggy street we therefore clattered and out upon the sands. By the sound of their steps when our feet last echoed on the rock pavement I knew I had gained ground on them. Without question I could outrun my pursuers if I had the endurance, but wearied by the hours in which I had been held captive, stiff from long remaining in a rigid position and weak from hunger, I knew that if I did not soon shake off that human wolf behind me, Descarte, it would come to a hand-to-hand struggle.

Then all at once I found myself stumbling among the fishing boats which had been drawn up that evening close together on the sand. Their blotted shapes

lay like sleeping animals of the sea; one checked my way when I darted into a space between two others, and though there was a narrow space through which I might have crawled, it seemed to my eyes in the yellow obscuring haze and in the haste of the moment that I was walled in, caught in a cul-de-sac. There was no time to make an examination. I whirled about and met Descarte rushing at me.

When however he saw that I waited to receive him, he abruptly stopped. My foot stirred a stick of wood and stooping quickly I picked it up; it was perhaps a foot long, no thicker than my thumb, a poor weapon of defense, but still a weapon of a sort. Desperate men clutch at straws; I clutched mine. Esper had run up — his legs were too short to keep the swift pace Descarte and I made — and now stood peering at us.

“You have him,” he panted.

“To be sure. Come, we will finish it,” Descarte snarled.

But Esper did not respond, nor did I anticipate any such move on his part. Descarte advanced a step, crouching forward, knife held at the end of a crooked arm. Suddenly he dashed at me; I leaped aside and smote him on the cheek. A curse burst from his lips, a curse of pain, and a second time he flew at me, lunging, while I again sprang from the boat against which I had backed. His knife-point missing its mark sank into the wood; and as before I dealt him a stinging blow upon the face.

Contempt for the stick which he first held had given way to respect; jerking his knife free, he retreated a pace or two and guarded me in my corner.

Thus we continued for a time watching each other. In the end he began a slow cautious crawling forward. More than ever he looked an animal, with his bare head on which the hair fell every way drawn down into his shoulders, his body crouching, both hands extended, the one clutching the knife, the other empty. So had similar beasts come out of their holes when the Bastille tumbled! Behind him was the figure of Esper; he watched motionless, giving Descarte no assistance, rendering me no aid; he had performed his part of our bargain, and now it remained with me to use the limbs which he had freed. Making a step on one side, I sought to widen the space between Descarte and the boat and leap through, but my antagonist kept even with me. I slipped to the other side; he too was there.

In the strange yellow haze that laid a ghastly light upon everything I could see the man's gleaming eyeballs and uncovered teeth. No longer was it for Del Hervalle or Pilon that he strove, no longer for a wage did he fight, but the lust of blood fired him, made his limbs agile, and caused his nostrils to quiver. We were now barely out of reach of one another. I too was crouching, knees bent, muscles tense, eyes never leaving his. Then he launched himself at me. With all my strength I whipped the stick down upon his hand; something snapped

— stick, wrist, something — the knife dropped at our feet and then I found myself locked in his clawing embrace. Backward and forward we swayed for a time, glaring, straining, our hot fierce breaths mingling. The man was strong — by Heaven, he was strong! — legs of iron, arms of thick oak, hands of steel. Then down upon the sands we fell.

Every detail of that picture, blurred by fog as it was, is still distinct in my mind. I lay on my back, for in the trial of strength he had bested me; close before my eyes he pressed his rage-drawn face contorted into hideous lines and wrinkles; past it and overhead were the masts of the boats rising vague and unsubstantial and ghostly. Esper had drawn near; he bent forward in excitement, resting his hands upon his knees and smiling his fantastic smile. Once he moistened his lips and half lifted his knife, as if to plunge it into Descarte's back, but he let his hand drop again upon his knee. And all about us was the strange golden fog.

Descarte had his hands under my body, where I had fallen upon them. Gripping his arms with mine, I sought to hold him; he tugged, gritting his teeth; I could feel the convulsive squirming of his body upon my own. Then, keeping his chest tight on mine, he began drawing up his knees; inch by inch he worked them forward. That I dare not allow, or he would presently have them doubled under him and upon my trunk, with which leverage he could free his hands and have me at his mercy. In the

minute or two while we lay thus at grip I had grown cooler and was able to calculate my chances, desperate as they were. He was stronger than I, the fact had already been demonstrated; by superior skill or by some trick must I win the victory. While I swiftly considered, I locked my legs over his and halted their upward drag. I tried a quick turn of his body — it nearly caught him, but he recovered himself and gritting out an oath between his teeth once more pressed me back. The holds and clinches known to wrestlers I dare not chance, for did I but cease the pressure I exerted upon his arms, aye, even for the fraction of a second, he would have had one of his powerful hands out and about my throat. Under my back I could feel them opening and shutting, working furiously. Nothing of wrestlers' laws knew he; his were the brute's straight instinctive methods. Again he began to draw up his knees; tighter I locked my leg-grip. I could hear Esper, strung with excitement of the contest, whispering to himself.

By now the tremendous strain was telling on us both. Perspiration burst from our foreheads and streamed upon our faces; our chests heaved one against the other with the labor of our breathing; yet to the one watcher we must have appeared as immovable as a sculptured piece of marble. I could feel the cords standing taut upon my temples; Descarte's face appeared a devilish masque cast in iron; the thumping of our hearts sounded like the

hurried beat of drums. Never for an instant did the contracting pull of his legs halt, never for an instant did his muscles relax, while I ceased to see anything but his two burning eyeballs. A little, a steady remorseless little, his legs drew through mine, little by little his back arched, his knees hitched upward.

At another time I might have held him, indeed, I have persuaded myself to the belief that I could have done so. But now I was far from proper condition for any struggle, let alone one with such a man; I had been strapped ten hours in a chair, bones were sore, muscles tired. I had had no water all day — what so much as thirst saps the strength and steals one's reserve? — and had no food. How indeed for so long I was able to hold him on equal terms, unless by sheer nerve or by a kind of fighting madness, has always been a wonder to me. In his squat thick shape there was concealed the immense power of a gorilla. Brain he had little; there was no cunning, no craft, no guile in his assault, no sudden surprise to be met in his attack. His was a steady, blind, enormous effort to crush.

And at last he got one knee upon my thigh. He gave a jerk and his right hand came free from under my back. A thrill of fear shot through me. I locked his arm in mine; desperately twisting, hauling, swaying, he sought to tear it out of my grip. A snarl was on his lips, a growl on his tongue; the little brass ring trembled in his ear. Now by some

sudden move I should have whirled him over, but weakness was stealing through my body. He wrenched his arm free, next instant his fingers clutched my throat. I caught his wrist, pulling at it. It did not yield. The breath fought in my lungs, the veins in my temples seemed to burst. Before me Descarte's wolfish features, and past his shoulder Esper's knotted face, the face of the one watcher who had crept near, and still past him the faint yellow disk of the moon, all began to sway and swing dizzily. Roaring was in my ears, fires were in my brain.

When I became conscious it was of a dead weight upon my body. The ringing was still in my ears, blood yet pounded at my temples, but I was breathing deep, life-giving breaths. For a while I did not move, lying with closed eyes. The man's hand was still on my throat, now however an idle hand. When I lifted my eyelids it was no longer to see Descarte's fierce face, only the tangled mat of his hair, for his head had fallen on my breast; in the crotch of my loin his knee remained, his back was still arched. Down upon us looked the moon and Esper's twisted features. My glance fell upon the handle of the knife which was buried in the man's back. He was dead. At the last instant Esper, that strange enigma of a human being, had plucked up and planted the villain's own knife in Descarte's body. With an effort that seemed to exhaust me I pushed the man off, then rolled over and struggled



to my knees, then to my feet. Esper caught me with a supporting hand, assisted me to the side of a boat, where I leaned for a time seeking to overcome the sickness that was on me, the sickness of exhaustion and horror and almost of the kiss of death. My throat seemed to have been torn out; I could only rub it feebly. My brain refused to work. I looked stupidly at the huddled lump of the dead man lying on the sands.

Presently Esper ran down to a pool and returned bearing his hat full and dripping. He dashed water into my face and under its stimulation my thoughts cleared, the paralysis left my body, and horror departed from my mind. So, stretching my arms and stamping my feet, I regained a little energy, while Esper put on his wet hat from which drops fell about the rim, and looked all around him at the night. For a moment neither of us spoke; I glanced up at the faint moon and at the shadowy boats standing close and silent in the weird, yellow, unearthly light, then finally down once more at the dark object on the sand at our feet.

Esper blew on his finger-nails, smiling his queer flickering smile, and gazed at me sidewise.

"But, *mon Dieu*," he said, "that was not a joke, that little *can-can* of yours!"

## CHAPTER XV

### THE TEUTONIC METHOD

Time has a fashion of playing queer tricks with clocks. Now the hours will flit by like dust-specks through a sunbeam, now they will lag like dragged weights; let the mind be free of all but routine incidents and the minutes will be ticked off unnoticed, let event crowd on event and seconds will swell to hours, hours to days. It seemed as if weeks had passed since I had set foot on the strand to come to the village in answer to the betraying message, yet but ten hours had elapsed. Morning beheld me lightly chaffing Andrew over a breakfast omelet; night saw me standing over a man newly killed. All the fantastic happenings of the day had thrown time out of gear, stretched it tremendously. Kaleidoscopic scenes succeeded one another in my mind: the coming of the messenger, the hurrying up the street, the blind unequal struggle in the room, my form bound to the chair, the jeering of Pilon, my peering out the window, the visit of Señor Del Hervalle, the breaking of the pane, the terrible fascination of watching the three men below me, my shouts to Billy, my dealings with Esper, the hurled chair, flight down the stair and along the golden

fog-filled street, the cautious crouching of Descarte and me, the struggle fierce and savage — and now Descarte's body like a black period at the end of the paragraph, lying on the sands.

Esper spoke to me. "Will you not go home now, monsieur?"

There was a note of solicitude in his voice. I laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Yes — and you?"

"It's not best that I go with you yet, master, while Pilon and the Señor are angry. Pilon's knife might peep in between my ribs and I should open my eyes wide in surprise. No, that will not do. I shall go back to the house and tell a fine story." For a moment he mused. "I shall go back running, scarcely able to gasp for breath and fright, my hair standing on end." How that would be accomplished I could not conceive. "Upon a stool I will collapse — I point, stutter, cry out that Descarte is dead like a pig, that I killed him because he set you free, and that you chased me all the way up the street even to the door, with a great club and greater curses. That will make a fine tale, eh?"

"It will satisfy even Señor Del Hervalle."

"But he will not laugh."

"No, I don't think he will laugh. The manner in which his plan has turned out will hardly amuse him."

"Ah, the Señor and Pilon will depart quickly from Lavouche, master, I am of the opinion."

"Why do you think so, little Esper?"

"They sought to kill and pickle you."

"They may invent a tale also."

Esper was visibly impressed. He looked up at the moon, down at Descarte's body, and rubbed his nose reflectively.

"Yes, a tale could be made."

"Can you guess, my valet, how the tale will run?"

Again he rubbed his nose, eying me. "A little."

"Del Hervalle will invent the tale and Pilon will tell it, and much money will be offered Esper also to tell it."

"There will be money then?"

"Undoubtedly."

"That is something; Lavouche seems a very good little purse for money."

"But you are my valet."

"Humph," said he thoughtfully.

"And therefore cannot tell the tale."

He looked about at the masts and off towards the island.

"Humph," said he once more, in a study.

"Well?" I asked.

"How much money will there be, master?"

"That depends on what amount you could squeeze out of them."

"Ah, then Señor would be an orange too; I could squeeze out a great deal."

"Unless he grew weary of being pressed and had

Pilon stop the sport with his knife, after which happening what Esper could say or do would not matter. The tale of Pilon alone would be enough. It is better to be a valet."

"Judgment would be necessary in order to squeeze the Señor just far enough," he remarked.

"Then you would lose your master and the five hundred dollars."

"Explain how lose that five hundred dollars? If you should have the honor, monsieur, of going to prison, you would yet have some days to pay the money."

"And you would fatten on extortion from both Señor Del Hervalle and me."

"Extortion — I like not that word."

I closed my hand on his shoulder. "Accept Señor's money, telling the tale he will invent, and I'll fill your little carcass with bullets. You shall speak the truth when the time comes or you'll join Descarte."

"I do not prefer the company of Descarte. Yet a fresh orange —" He did not finish.

"My warning is clear."

Lifting his face, he gazed at me, mouth and nose drawn to one side in his whimsical smile. That I should do as I said, he read in my eyes.

"Master —"

"That is better, always say 'master.'"

"Pardon, 'monsieur' was what I intended. I will consider the matter."

My hand still grasped his shoulder. I increased the pressure.

"Aye, consider it and carefully. Now I shall go home."

Out from amongst the tangle of boats we went. When we listened, there was no sound save that of the distant surf rolling on the shore. Mayhap Señor Del Hervalle awaited in the attic of the ancient stone house some tidings of the pursuit; mayhap Pilon smoked somewhere up yonder in the fog where his boat lay ready on the water, and cursed and wondered why no one came. Del Hervalle should have his tidings, but Pilon might wait till his boat rotted before any prisoner came.

"I will begin running that I may tell my tale without breath," Esper announced. "Also it will be best to be without a hat." He flung it upon the sand and drew his knife. "I bid you good evening, master or monsieur, which one I do not as yet know." And he set off on a run towards the street, melting away in the fog.

Turning my face southward, I walked slowly along the beach. Directions were difficult to keep, and I drew in nearer to the dark outline of the bordering trees which would serve me as a guide. The weird yellow fog was all about me. I could hear the faint murmur which continues in a wood even upon the quietest night, the little talk of insects and leaves and bark and dripping moisture. And always there was the steady insistent muffled note of the sea.

Half the distance I had covered when I heard voices. Strung as I still was by the excitement through which I had passed, my nerves on edge, my mind quick to conceive danger, I listened while my heart beat a fresh alarm. Danger I had breathed for ten hours; the whole island seemed yet to bristle with new and invisible dangers. The speakers drew nearer; I could see their shapes, vague blurs in the fog, two of them, and presently I recognized Andrew's substantial tones in speaking. I uttered a shout, and they hurried to me.

"It's you, then," Billy Harrington exclaimed, when they joined me. "What have you been up to? We've been worried to death." He peered into my face. "Why, man, you look as if you'd been shot out of a twelve-inch gun — hat gone, face dirty, head bloody, clothes torn."

"Perhaps I do," I answered. "I've been a prisoner all day and have just now come near being killed."

"Oh, Master Charles — oh, Master Charles, if I had only known where to come to you!" Andrew cried with emotion.

How good it was to have such staunch friends! Good noble old Andrew, who would have run his gray head into any danger to save me a jot of pain; honest Billy Harrington, who would have followed me, eager as a hound upon a scent, into any den of scoundrels!

As we walked to Stag Lodge, I briefly told my

story, how I had been trapped, imprisoned, released, and recounted my final struggle with Descarte. Then I learned what had occurred during my absence. When I had not appeared for lunch, Andrew had not been greatly surprised, for he knew that I sometimes stayed at Moore House; that I was not fishing he knew by the cat-boat, which was still overturned upon the beach exactly as I had left it in order that the new paint might dry. About three o'clock however doubts began to assail him; the previous visit of the fishermen arose in his mind, as well as recollection of my surveillance by that rascal Esper and my throwing Pilon into the water. Any one of these embroilments might have a connection with my absence. He put on his hat and made his way to Moore House, where he learned that I had not appeared; Betty, to whom he confided his doubts and vague fears, also became alarmed; they determined upon a search. Into the wood they went a little way, but of course found nothing. At the village it appeared that no one had seen me, since it happened that I had passed up the street in the middle of the morning when men were absent and housewives busy. Betty, remembering the sinister warning which Margot had given her to deliver, grew more anxious. Beware strange doors — but what doors? Sending Andrew back to look again in the wood, she went up the street examining every door on each side; nothing out of the common rewarded her — they seemed



only ordinary doors. Then she decided in spite of her antipathy for the dark mysterious woman to seek Margot and question her as to her enigmatical words. Margot was at such and such a neighbor's, she learned from Margot's mother, and when she reached the designated neighbor's Margot had gone, it was not known whither. Disappointed in this direction, disquieted by uncertain fears, she knew not what to do. Depressed, anxious, weary, she set out for home. On the way she found Andrew standing on the wood road. He had returned to the Lodge, where upon the veranda he discovered the Baron, who was somewhat surprised that he had not been escorted that day by Descarte, but accounting for it on the ground of the fellow's sore feet; somewhat curious too that neither Andrew nor I was at home. My servant made the conventional answer that I was spending the day out and would return that evening, whereupon the Baron had taken his departure. To Mr. Moore Betty and Andrew expressed their fears; he only laughed. Could n't a young fellow miss a meal without anything being the matter? I would show up in a short time. As it was now approaching six o'clock and a guest would soon arrive in the person of William Harrington, Andrew once more took his way homeward. He went about the preparation of supper with a very heavy heart; somehow fear haunted him in spite of all logic—besides, I was one to get into trouble; had I not caused him immeasurably more

worry than had either my father or my grandfather, or both put together? Thus he mixed doubt with his batter and stirred anxiety in the gravy. Finally, when it was near seven, Harrington appeared.

To him, while he ate, Andrew made known my disappearance. Billy ruminated. I might be about some business of my own; on the other hand, had I received his wire? Yes, and had planned to meet him with a cart at the railway station, but Antoine's cart, which I was to have used, had not been called for. Billy ruminated afresh, he cheered Andrew and ruminated; for did he not recall the singular occurrence which had happened when he went up the village street to inquire the way to my house? A voice had shouted his name, my voice; a blood-curdling yell had resounded between the walls, my yell. But I was nowhere to be seen when he looked about and then no longer to be heard. Where had that wild yell come from? He had cast about in every direction; before him a short distance stood a little fellow who smiled crookedly and said the man who yelled was a drunkard in the attic of the house, a toper who believed rats were gnawing his toes. Oh, yes, it was only that pig of a drunkard. So Harrington, imagining himself to have been deceived in my voice, had turned into the inn, asked the road to my house, and being informed thereupon set forth anew.

Eight o'clock struck by the time he finished sup-

per. Fog covered the island, darkness had closed down; the pair of men could do nothing but speculate upon my whereabouts. They sat before the fireplace one on each side, smoking their pipes, now and again uttering a surmise, though for the most part silent; at nine o'clock, at which time the moon rose and in a degree lighted the foggy night, they decided to make a fresh search. For, as Harrington sat and pondered, recollection of my frantic yell grew upon him; that it was my voice he was confident and reluctantly informed Andrew of his adventure. They wandered down to my little wharf before starting for the village, on the chance of finding me there, but instead encountered the Baron, who was looking out to sea. He also displayed anxiety over my disappearance, which was not strange considering that though he was an opponent he had eaten of my bread and salt and was a gentleman. A few suggestions he offered, he asked a number of questions, and showed that he was a great deal disturbed by the news. He had come to Stag Lodge to while away a dull evening, he explained, and he expressed every hope of my speedy return without misadventure. Were we going to the village? Then he would remain on the spot to watch in case I came during their absence. Certainly the Baron was a gentleman whom one would wish to number among one's friends.

"Well, I came at last," I said.

"Very hungry you must be too, Master Charles,"

Andrew said, "for you've had nothing all day. Whatever you wish, I'll prepare."

"Let it be something solid and plenty of it."

Billy was dissatisfied. "I call this devilish hard luck for me to miss all the fun and not get a whack at those fellows."

"We've not finished with them yet, by any means," I answered.

"I hope not. Certainly I was stupid this evening when I heard you yell and did n't follow the cry. I should have gone into that house and up the stair ten steps at a time."

I smiled. "One can't go tearing into strange houses, you know, on a mere suspicion. Besides, you could n't be expected to know that I was in a particularly interesting situation, and further you did n't know which house to rush."

"I could have looked around a bit."

Clearly he believed that he had missed an opportunity. The rest of his life would be lived with that memory to vex him.

"Never fear, if I know Del Hervalle and Pilon there'll be chances yet," said I. "I'm glad there's nothing more to happen to-night, I'm tired as a dog."

Of the chances that were to come I spoke truly; of the uneventfulness of the night, not so near the truth. We came at last to the edge of the wood, where it gave way before my lawn. Billy sent a hail to the Baron, who had remained at the wharf,

but there was no response, and so, agreeing with Andrew's suggestion that he had probably walked a little distance up the east beach and would presently return, we began the ascent of the slope. The lighted windows would inform him of our arrival.

"But I'm hardly in a state to entertain visitors," I said, "either the Baron or yourself. A bath, supper, and bed for me."

"I'll do the entertaining," Billy replied. "Who is the German gentleman anyway?"

"Baron von Hussman. Of the army too, though he has not committed himself as to his rank." I described the circumstances of our meeting, encounter, and subsequent acquaintance. "So you see that our friendship, if such it may be called, is upon a conditional footing. He's after the map; I am hiding it from him. Just as in the case of Del Hervalle, while we play the game, we preserve the outward amenities. And there are girls here," I added maliciously.

He stopped dead, and when he spoke it was in an aggrieved tone.

"Why the deuce do you want to spoil it with girls?"

I laughed. "They are very nice girls."

"Of course. But this is a man's island and a man's war. Girls ought to stay at home. They'll get their skirts in the way and upset the fun."

"I think not."

"Well, I know," he said with emphasis. "I've experienced them of old."

"You need n't worry in Lavouche," I replied, starting up the lawn. "Señor Del Hervalle will see to that — and besides they add a touch of color to the war."

Not for a million diamonds would I have had Betty away from Lavouche, not since I had learned the interest my unknown fate had aroused in her. Love could only have sent her worrying, scurrying about the island and through the village with Andrew in search of me. I wondered if at this very minute she was not questioning the night of my whereabouts.

Inside the house Andrew lighted a lamp and went into the kitchen to cook my supper. Billy and I stood before the fire warming our hands.

"This map has turned out to be something, after all," he remarked.

"Yes."

"Have you learned which particular fortress it is?"

"No, Del Hervalle, the scoundrel, knows of course, as he knew the facts of every affair in which Douglass was mixed. But he declines to tell."

"Well, we'll have to find out."

"That will be difficult."

"When we've caught the Señor and tied him up, we'll see. I know a trick or two to make obstinate

men talk." Billy spoke cold-bloodedly and business-like.

"I'll gladly assist you at the operation," I stated.

He meditated for a moment.

"There's no danger of his stealing the map, is there?"

"Steal it, no. He has had his fingers within an inch of it, so has the Baron, and neither ever divined the fact."

"Then it must be well hid."

"Wait, I'll show you." I fetched the tankard. "There."

Billy looked at it with a puzzled eye.

"Inside?"

"Yes, inside."

I lifted the top to allow him to peer in.

"I see nothing but the bottom."

"Here, come across to the light." I set the tankard upon the table. "See the small plug? That holds a flat dish. You mistake it for the bottom, even now with little wine over it. When it is filled, you do not see it at all."

He straightened up.

"Fine! Your friend, the Baron, would give a thousand dollars to know that secret."

A quiet voice spoke from near by.

"I'm afraid that you overstate the amount."

Just in front of the portières which hung before a door of a bedchamber stood the Baron himself.

A smile was on his lips, a revolver in his hand. Beside him was a second man, bearded, garbed in yachting costume. He also pointed a revolver.

I began to believe with the Baron that the amount which had been quoted was rather high.



## CHAPTER XVI

### WANTED — A FORTRESS

They advanced closer.

"Gentlemen, I must beg of you to make no resistance, nor raise a cry," Von Hussman addressed us, impressing his remarks with the point of the pistol he carried ready. "It would be of no use in any case. I shall take charge of the tankard, if you please, and we will now go down to the beach. Kindly give me your attention while I explain what it is necessary to do; the dingey of my friend's yacht is awaiting us a little way up from your wharf, Mr. Woodworth, and we will proceed to it. On the yacht we shall drop a few miles down the coast and set you ashore, which will prevent you from giving an immediate alarm and at the same time enable us to put well out to sea. I regret that occasion has arisen for making such a return for the hospitality that I have enjoyed at Stag Lodge, but circumstances often force us into an apparent discourtesy. None is intended." He smiled quietly. "As I say, resistance is useless. You, Mr. Woodworth, have become well enough acquainted with me to know that in this matter I am in earnest; I will if necessary shoot one of you, and my friend,

Herr Amsen, will dispose of the other. We now understand the affair and will go ahead. Mr. Woodworth, you will be so good as to carry the tankard — and I must insist that you make no effort to shake out the dish which you have mentioned as being in it."

He locked his arm in mine, his friend did the same with Billy, and we walked through the door and out into the night, I bearing a gift to the Germans.

"With your permission, I would speak," said I.

"To be sure, there's nothing to prevent conversation," the Baron laughed.

But I was not in a laughing humor. Instead I looked grimly at Billy, who was marching in silence in the arm-grip of the sturdy, bearded yachtsman.

"I desire only to remind my friend, Lieutenant Harrington, of his recent remark in which he expressed a fear that he would have no chance for fun."

Billy said nothing, neither did he look my way. The Baron however was amused.

"And so Mr. Harrington is an officer," said he. "In the American army, I suppose?"

"Quite right."

"That is good. I have the honor to fill an officer's rank in the army of my own country. While we are sailing down the coast, he and I shall discuss military subjects, shall we not, Lieutenant? We'll

have a famous discussion, in fact, one on the modern theory of strategy."

"I fear that late practice would tell to your advantage, Baron," Billy retorted.

"Possibly. This evening, for example. The maxim, Unexpected Attack in Superior Strength, is still unassailable as a war measure." Decidedly the Baron was amused.

We reached the wharf, turned north, and followed up the beach a hundred yards to where we came upon a boat. Two stout sailors, dressed in blue uniforms, came smartly to attention as we stopped. Amsen, who appeared to be both owner and captain of the yacht for which we were bound, assisted Billy into the boat, still keeping fast hold upon his arm, while the Baron guided me to a seat and dropped down by my side. The sailors pushed off, sprang in, and seized their oars.

"You're a little surprised at the turn of events, my dear Woodworth," said my seat-mate.

"Oh, I knew you would spring some trick pretty soon."

The Baron fingered his moustache, stroking its ends upward complacently.

"I was really on my way to join Amsden at Boston for a short cruise when I made your acquaintance on the train. The map interested me, so I dropped him a wire to hold up till he received further word. That was a heavy check you gave me over yonder, the evening of our coming."

"You're having your revenge now, Baron."

"Revenge, oh no. That blow did not rankle in my heart; on the contrary, it aroused my respect. It's a solid fist you carry."

I moved the tankard on my lap. Disgust, not wrath, filled me. To have such a tame and farcical ending to the day, and to have it with this German opponent after what I had been through with Señor Del Hervalle, drained me of anger. Once the notion to fling the tankard into the sea flashed into my mind; but the Baron's hand which held the revolver rested in plain view upon his knee. It was a very large revolver and a very businesslike one. Furthermore, I consoled myself with the thought that no harm would follow with the map in Von Hussman's possession; he would probably destroy it or forward it to his government, where it would be buried forever. It was by no manner of means the same thing as if Señor Del Hervalle's fat little fingers had got hold of it. So I mused and nursed the tankard and thought of many things, among them of the dead man lying on the sand by the ghostly boats, and of Andrew rubbing his bewildered head because Master Charles had again vanished and that without eating his supper.

"And this yacht?" I inquired.

"Why, I had but to drop a wire from the railway station for it to steam up here. It arrived last night and lay off shore. In accordance with the instructions given in my telegram Amsen put out

at daybreak in a launch and met me up near the lighthouse, whither I walked. There our plans to co-operate were arranged."

"His then was the vessel's smoke I saw this morning," I said, a light breaking upon my mind.

"Yes."

"We're certainly not rowing out that distance in this fog!"

"By no means. Under cover of the mist he drew in close to the island. The yacht is not over two hundred yards off shore and we can't be far away now."

Indeed, but a few minutes elapsed before a vague shape loomed up, growing more distinct with every pull of the oars. The sea was smooth, black, and oily, and our boat rose and sank as each swell lifted it and let it slide into a hollow. At last we were close upon the craft. It was a trim steam yacht, not large, though judging by its lines a fast sailer; we came alongside and maneuvered to catch the step let down for us.

"I will take the tankard," the Baron said significantly. "I can't afford now to have it slip into the sea." And it was his hand that carried it up the ladder.

We were led immediately to Captain Amsen's cabin, the captain lingering a moment to give a few directions to the mate. Even as he joined us and we sat down about the table we could hear the steam winch dragging up the anchor and

sailors' feet moving about the deck in obedience to orders.

"It may interest you, Baron," I said, "to know that you've robbed me not only of my map but of my supper. I don't know which is worse. But as a prisoner of war I demand food under the humane law of nations."

"By all means, you shall have it. Captain, will you kindly have a steward bring sandwiches and wine?"

These were forthcoming. As I ate and Amsen and Billy smoked, the Baron drew the dish from the tankard. "Very ingeniously contrived," said he. Then unscrewing the top and opening the bag, he spread out the map upon the table, fastening its corners with pins. Neither Amsen nor Billy made any effort to examine the sheet, nor did he invite them — Germany's fortifications were not for general inspection.

Presently a tremor ran through the yacht, the screw was turning. In some thirty or forty minutes Billy and I should be cast ashore to find ourselves with a ten-mile walk home ahead of us; what little Esper would have called an excellent joke. And while we trudged up the beach Amsen and the Baron would be speeding eastward for the open sea; for that matter, they could return with impunity to Boston or to New York for all the harm we could do them. Verily, if our tale were told it would be only to make ourselves a laughing stock.

Captain Amsen was a short, thick-set man, ruddy, bearded, and with twinkling blue eyes. A glass of whiskey and water sat before him, he puffed his pipe methodically, while he watched me devour his food.

"You look as if you had been in action, Mr. Woodworth," he remarked finally. "One cheek is covered with dried blood."

I had forgotten my appearance.

"Well, I have, captain. I was nearly killed by a man just before meeting you and the Baron—your sandwiches are very good."

Von Hussman lifted his head smiling, believing that I jested. But he perceived that I was in earnest.

"You mean it, Woodworth?" he asked.

"Just that," said I. "Señor Del Hervalle trapped me in a house, kept me a prisoner all day, and I only escaped after a knife reached a man's heart."

Leaning an elbow upon the table, he listened. That a map of one of his country's forts lay before him passed for the time out of his mind. He bent his eyes on me, scrutinizing my smeared face and torn attire, then blew out a puff of the cigar he smoked.

"And so that was why you were absent all day. Señor Del Hervalle appears to carry Venezuelan methods with him wherever he goes."

"There you're mistaken, Baron. Venezuela has

nothing to teach Del Hervalle when it comes to villainous tricks. On the other hand, I think that the Señor has probably instructed his patron, *El Presidente*, in a few of the finer subtleties of intrigue and treachery."

"At any rate, he stimulates my interest the more I learn of him," he said. "I hope to become better acquainted with him personally."

He touched a bell; the steward again entered.

"Conduct this gentleman to a cabin and wash and mend the cut on his head," he ordered.

Of this opportunity I took advantage. Dirt and blood were removed, and the steward patched up with strips of plaster the wound which I had received in breaking the window.

When I returned, the Baron was again deep in his study of the map, while Billy and the captain were chatting amiably. They were discussing our detention; Billy maintained that all the laws of civilized warfare commanded that we should not be set upon a barren beach in the middle of the night and that so far as he was concerned he was comfortable and very well satisfied. Through the smoke that rose from the china bowl of his pipe the captain's blue eyes twinkled. Prisoners were not supposed to be allowed cabin privileges; if we were carried until morning it would be necessary to place us in irons. He had some very stout irons.

At this point in their bantering discussion the Baron leaned back in his seat and remained with



arms folded, thinking; for my part I was more interested in what might be passing through his brain than at what decision the debaters might arrive. Now that he had seen the map, what thoughts ran through his mind? Did he perhaps recall in the diagram the very fortification which it outlined? Did he, now that all danger was passed, pleasantly speculate on what might have happened had the sheet fallen into England's or France's hands? Or did his mind seek to guess the spot where lay the treachery or carelessness which permitted such a betrayal? It seemed that he revolved none of these questions in his mind, that instead he had an ear for what was being spoken.

"It's a pity, is it not, captain, that they must be set ashore?" he said. "On my side, I am for company. Time has been rather dull for me of late, the days I've spent in Lavouche; Mr. Woodworth was very considerate, but of course could not devote all his leisure to a man who was seeking to despoil him. As for the woman who kept the tavern, she was busy with a stocking — I used to crack my jaws yawning. Here we are, all four; we could have a very pleasant evening."

"I vote for it," Billy answered promptly. "Better an enemy where cheer is, than a friend and ten miles of beach."

Von Hussman turned to the captain. "We'll run out a distance to sea," said he.

Amsen, who in the matter of the night's arrange-

ments had placed himself and his yacht at his friend's disposal, left the cabin to give the necessary orders for the change. Well, I meditated, it mattered little now whether I spent the night on land or sea, since I would be far from Stag Lodge in any case. As Billy had stated, we were very comfortable here; only the thought of Andrew worrying his old head disturbed me. I uttered my reflections aloud.

"Andrew is a very good servant," the Baron said, smiling. "He always brought me your own particular cigarettes or cigars when I called in your absence. Not fetching him with us was an oversight on my part — Andrew should have been made a prisoner also. We will go back and get him."

"Go back!"

"Surely; so long as we sail, does it make any difference where? I'll not let him worry his brain any longer than is necessary."

"Baron, I rather like your free and easy style of maneuvering," Billy said.

The steward was called, and this new request transmitted to the captain. We could feel the yacht swinging in a circle as the helm was put about; if ever there was a curious voyage, this was the one. Consider: a yacht putting back upon its course in order that the body-servant of a prisoner which it carried might not worry his head. The Baron smoked and supped his wine. The map which he had been so eager to obtain lay outspread upon the

table. It was not to be wondered at that he was in complacent spirits; mine were the opposite, for my eyelids were heavy and my body was worn out. If the Baron had made the proposition to land us at Lavouche on the condition that we were not to give notice of his kidnapping for a specified time, I would have snapped at such an agreement; for I wanted bed, and it was only by vigorous pulling at my pipe that I kept my eyes open.

After a time Von Hussman said:

"Mr. Woodworth, I shall ask a favor of you. This has been an odd affair and I am going to presume so far as to beg you to give me this tankard as a souvenir."

I looked at the tankard. It was not particularly valuable, and I had no especial desire to retain it.

"Take it," said I. "It's part of the loot, and Captain Amsen may keep the dish it held."

The captain, who had just entered and who stood wiping the fine fog-moisture off his beard, stated that he should indeed like to have the dish as a souvenir of his visit to the little island of Lavouche; he had been several times about the world in his yacht, yet remembered nothing in his sailing adventures so strange as what had now happened. When he was far away, he would occasionally sit of an evening and look at the dish and think how he had committed two crimes at once, one by robbery on land and the other by kidnapping at sea.

"And now what will our poor friend Señor Del

Hervalle do; he who stirred up the little village by the story that you were selling a map of a French fort to that terrible German who did nothing in the inn?" Von Hussman laughed. "All his thinking and scheming to get the map has come to naught. He will be rarely disappointed; he may even be offended at you, Woodworth, for letting it slip."

"Oh, he'll keep after me in any case. So far as he's concerned the map is an incidental matter now — of course he would like to have it — but it's my life he's after."

Half an hour later we heard the screw decrease its revolutions until the yacht barely kept headway. We had come once more to the island. The Baron arose and folding the map motioned us to follow him on deck, where we should wait while a boat was lowered to find the yacht's relative position. So, leaning on the rail, we watched the second officer go with a pair of sailors out into the fog to locate the beach; from time to time the yacht siren let loose its bellow to keep them informed of our berth. Overhead the rigging dripped, while beneath our feet the wet deck shone from the cabin lights as if it had been oiled, and the moon diffused as it had done an hour before its strange golden light through the fog.

All at once the Baron turned to me, smiling.

"My dear Woodworth, this has been an acquaintance which I trust will not cease in the future. I have just spent a month in Washington as a guest

of the German Legation; I am now about to set out on a short cruise with Amsen, thence to Berlin. I shall mail you my address so that in case you are in our capital you will give me opportunity to return the favors I have received at your hands. My stay at Lavouche I have enjoyed notwithstanding my mind was not always at ease as to what would be the final disposition of this map. So far as I am concerned my solicitude ends when I return it to your hands." And still smiling, he presented the folded sheet to me.

"But — but —" I stammered.

"Why do I do this, is that what you would ask? Because, whatever fortress it is a map of, it is not one of Germany's. I am in a position to know; I was some time connected with the Empire's General Staff."

I looked at the map; I stared at him.

"Then what fort is it?"

"Ah, that I don't know."

"If Douglass had only written the name!" I exclaimed in disappointment.

"Yes, it would have helped. Still there are some things to be surmised; certain technical characteristics exist in the methods and conceptions of each country, as one might say, an individuality. For instance, Germany does a thing one way, France in another, Russia in still a third. The difference lies in certain features which the untrained and unknowing eye would never observe, but this difference is

present just as there exists a fundamental difference between the cheek bones of Slavs, Teutons, and Latins."

"Well, what do the cheek bones of this map tell you?" I asked.

"In the first place, that it's not only not German but not French."

"Well?"

"Nor Russian, nor Austrian, nor English."

I looked at him. He still smiled. A jest seemed hidden somewhere in his reply.

"That does n't leave much."

"Not much. The boat is awaiting you. Good-bye, Woodworth; good-bye, Lieutenant, have your government send you over as an attaché — I'll keep an eye out for you." He shook Billy's hands. "And good-bye to you again, Woodworth. I'll write. Come over and visit me."

"But the map!" I expostulated. "Is n't there a fortress at all?"

His smile grew broader than ever.

"If I were to guess," he answered, "I'd say the cheek bones are American. Let us hazard a further speculation and say Western cheek bones."

"The devil!"

"Certainly. Perhaps I should have kept this paper in case we should ever go to war with you, but after all" — he shook my hand again — "I have the tankard. I shall hold it up betimes and say, 'This once held an American fortress.'"

I followed Billy down into the boat. We put off. Still mute with amazement, clutching the map, I gazed back at the figure of the man who leaned upon the rail and waved a hand after us and vanished with the yacht in the fog.

## CHAPTER XVII

### LAVOUCHE CEASES TO FISH

Excitement in Lavouche was intense. Not since that day twenty years before when Ambrose Velais had eloped to Quebec with Melinée's wife, and thence none knew where, with Melinée after them, from which pursuit none of the three ever returned, had there been such a sensation in the little village and on the island. To sell a French map to Germany might be a felony; this was a far graver affair, this killing of a man. The narrative ran that I had stolen into the village, having an appointment with the German, at which time I was to turn over the map for a large sum of gold; Esper following me and also Descarte, and Pilon, who went another way among the boats. The stranger and I had met on the beach, we were concluding our transaction when Esper and Descarte and Pilon, who had been appointed by the townsmen to observe us, to see that no transaction was made, had run forward to stop this perfidious bargaining away of France's honor. The German and I had turned about and fought them. Esper had been beaten off with a walking stick, but I had stabbed Descarte with a knife. Pilon, who had been behind the other, ran up like



a hero; Descarte, whom until now none had liked, had died for his native country. Such was the story. Pilon told it with many a flourish of his moustache. For did he not know the whole occurrence? Truly. Now, if Pilon had but been at the meeting in the beginning — he left it to be inferred what would have happened, but at any rate whatever it was the result would have been something different. Now also look you, where was the German? He had settled his bill with madame, the inn-woman, and was gone.

The corpse had lain on the sands till daybreak, where the fishermen coming down to their boats found it. At first they had perhaps imagined Pilon or Esper to have stabbed Descarte in a drunken quarrel of their own. Such quarrels had been frequent. Standing about the body, these tanned and sturdy fishermen were at a loss to know what to do, confused what move to make before this evidence of a murder. Drowned men, men who lost their lives by all the accidents of storm and tide, were common to them; the deep demanded its toll and they accepted the fact with fishermen's philosophical remark, *Tiens, comme il faut*, but this was something different. While they were engaged in grave speculations, came to them Pilon and Esper. It was I who had done the deed, I, Charles Woodworth. Then the fishermen had looked even graver, for I was another person from Pilon, whom they suspected.

"Thou liest," said Jean vehemently to them.

"It is so. Ask this Woodworth," Pilon exclaimed.

A number of the men raised the body; they carried it in a sail up the street to Pilon's house, where they laid it upon the table. At this unwonted sight of their husbands and fathers returning when they should by this time have been well out of *The Throat* and on their way to the fishing grounds, wives and children poured forth from doors. This happened while yet day was in the foggy dawn. Many went down again to look at the place where the struggle had occurred; they pointed to the disturbed spot, to dark stains on the sand; Esper's hat, which he had lost while fleeing from me and the German was found — a confirmation of the tale.

Jean came to my house about eight o'clock. He stood in grave silence for a moment holding his sou'wester in his hand.

"Descarte was found dead among the boats this morning," he said. "They say you killed him."

"I did not, Jean."

"Then it is a lie, as I said."

"Listen," said I; and I told him the whole story.

Jean silently put out his brown hand to grip mine. Here was another who would stand at my shoulder through thick and thin, who knew I spoke the real happening and would not fail me.

"That Esper, if he speak not the truth when the time comes, I will settle with him," he said grimly.

On his discretion I could also depend. Until the

perhaps hung like any other criminal," she went on, while her eyes were fixed upon me unblinking.

"There is that possibility also."

"That is true, very true. Much talk also will there be at the inquest. Pilon will talk and Esper will talk and Surçon will talk and old Gaspard will talk — for he, above all others, could not live and not talk on such a day — and monsieur will talk, and perhaps some more. We shall see what we see and hear what we hear."

"You speak with great wisdom, madame, as ever," I answered dryly. And we went on up the street to the mayor's home.

Surçon was at home, and with him three or four of the elder fishermen with whom he was in the habit of consulting when the solution of an affair was not easy. What was to be done with me was the question under discussion; county officers would of course take charge of the affair as soon as they were notified, but until a warrant was sworn out for my arrest and the sheriff arrived, what was to be done? Pilon had offered to make the formal charge. But in the mean time? Whether I would flee or remain, and if remaining fight, and if fighting kill more men of Lavouche? It was at this point in the discussion that we entered the room where they had convened. Surçon with naïve frankness informed us what agitated their minds; now that I was here I could tell them which of the aforementioned courses I should follow. When there-

fore I stated that I intended neither to run nor to fight, he declared that that was indeed well; that though I had perhaps committed a murder, I was yet a gentleman; and that Lavouche would appreciate my acquiescence in taking a sensible course in a difficult matter. To my statement that I was ready for an investigation, and would let the village conduct an examination at the coroner's inquest if they so desired, they expressed surprise, considered the subject at some length, and finally pronounced it good. The mayor by virtue of his office had the right, if indeed he were not so compelled, to make inquiry into drownings, arsons, thefts, assaults, slanders, perjuries, accidents, births, wrecks, deaths of all kinds, murders, marriages, sickness, drunkenness, poverty, quarrels, village taxes, and whatsoever concerned the welfare of Lavouche.

These and all things, it was agreed, came within the province of the mayor to examine; an inquiry into Descarte's death would therefore be both well and wise; while old Gaspard's boat-shop, the largest room in the village, would be the place to hold the investigation. There all could be present, for it was good public policy that all should be admitted. And so, when I answered that the sooner it was conducted the better it would suit me, two o'clock was decided upon by the counselors.

As I and my two companions returned down the village, we encountered Pilon holding forth to a group of men and women. I was a scoundrel who

should be hung and given to the crows, said Pilon, who in the ardor of his speech failed to perceive that we had halted upon the edge of the little crowd. For I had slain Descarte by a cowardly blow in the back — that was God's truth. Pilon fiercely stroked his moustache. Yes, I should be hung and the crows allowed to pick my bones! Was that not so, Esper? Esper scratched his nose and observing me smiled his furtive smile. That might be possible, remarked Esper, but also it might not be possible — the outcome was yet to be seen, it depended somewhat upon certain matters. Yet it might not be inadvisable to ask monsieur himself. Pilon thus apprised of my presence swung about, glaring at me, and uttered an insolent curse, but did not ask the question. There were three in our party while he had only Esper as an ally. So after a moment we passed on to the end of the street, where Jean separated from us.

Stevens, the servant by whose hand I had been captured on my first visit to Moore House, was the only person visible when Harrington and I emerged from the wood upon the pleasant lawn of that dwelling. Engaged in thought, he did not at first see us, but presently touched his hat. There was something behind his customary deference; I detected a suppressed and hesitating eagerness which well-trained servants are generally supposed not to experience or at least not to display. Finally he addressed me:

“Begging your pardon, Mr. Woodworth, I'd

like to consult you. Perhaps I should not mention this, sir, but I know you are somewhat mixed up in the affairs of Señor Del Hervalles. You'll possibly remember that you once asked me to keep an eye on Señor Del Hervalles. It was upon the night we caught you for a thief and when the Señor recognized you first shot, but said he did n't. Well, later Miss Elizabeth gave me a bit of money also and asked me to let her know if Señor Del Hervalles did anything out of the ordinary. 'Not usual to spy on guests, Stevens,' says she, 'but the Señor is not a usual guest,' and therefore, Mr. Woodworth, whenever my time was not occupied I kept an eye on both the Señor and his secretary. Not until this morning did I notice anything strange. Then I saw the Señor and Mr. Davis go, when they thought no one observed them, with a load of baggage along the path that leads to the north point of the island."

"The north point! What were they doing there?" I exclaimed.

"That was exactly what I wanted to know, so I followed hiding behind bushes. I beheld a sailboat drawn up on the beach above high-tide, in which they placed their things. It is an out-of-way spot, sir, no one will be going that way for some time."

"And what do you make of this, Stevens?"

A twinkle came into the man's eye. "When luggage is moved to a boat, sir, it is generally for the purpose of making a voyage."

"So Señor Del Hervalle and Mr. Davis are departing and surreptitiously. We must keep watch — you did entirely right in informing me; from now on, for the rest of this day especially, they must be watched. Did you know, Stevens, that I had committed a murder?"

"You?"

"So Señor Del Hervalle says. That is one of the new matters of difference between that gentleman and me. You'll hear all about it in the village this afternoon if you are there, and I want you as a witness. Keep near the Señor and do what I tell you. Is that clear?"

"Yes, sir."

"Also obey anything this gentleman with me orders — Lieutenant Harrington, who is my friend."

"I'll do so, Mr. Woodworth." Then with a grin, "I — I hope something will happen. It's been dull since our tumble here that night on the lawn."

His face was honest, shrewd, humorous, eager; he eyed me respectfully, but also with something more than respect, friendliness.

"It's my opinion, Stevens, that something will happen to fulfill your wish. Keep close to the Señor in any event."

Billy remained chatting with him, while I made my way into the house. Mr. Moore and Señor Del Hervalle were engaged, but the latter, together with his secretary, presently came forth from the library,

greeting me politely though passing on without pause. When I found myself alone with Mr. Moore, I went at my tale without preface or preliminaries. I had drawn him as far as possible into a window recess, where I poured out without reservation the history of Señor Del Hervalle as I knew it, from the time of his appearance in Forge up till the present moment. Perfect as was his self-possession, it gradually gave way to intense interest. At its conclusion he said:

"Either Señor Del Hervalle is the greatest of scoundrels or you are mad, Charles."

"Incredible as it may seem, Mr. Moore, it's the truth. Mr. Fenton and Jack Maitland can and will identify him for D'Urville, the man of Forge and an unprincipled villain; so far as concerns the affair since it has progressed on this island, the proof I bring is slender. But it is proof nevertheless. Stevens, your own servant, can testify that your guest recognized me the first night he laid eyes on me here in your house; Betty suspects him; Andrew will tell you how the envoy attempted to force him at the point of a pistol to disclose the hiding place of the map; Harrington, my friend, will state that he heard me shouting from the window of the house where I was kept prisoner in the village; more than one villager in fact could inform you, did we but lay hands on the right ones, that Del Hervalle has entered Pilon's house and is a familiar in it. And finally Betty it was who conveyed to me the warn-



ing given by Margot, who is on friendly terms with Señor Del Hervalle's secretary."

"I alone seem to know nothing of what has been going on."

"Naturally, Mr. Moore. In your mind more than any one else's Del Hervalle must keep himself free of suspicion."

"It's certainly a grave affair, with many complications."

"He's an envoy, that's true, but is he not amenable to punishment?"

"Our government must proceed delicately."

"Diplomacy of course must be served and its forms observed," I said dryly. "The attempted murder of a private American citizen should not, I admit, be allowed to interfere with the smooth workings of the State Department."

He colored slightly. "You do me an injustice, Charles, for I and the government I represent would be as quick to act for the protection of one of its citizens, even against a whole foreign power, as it would be for its own honor. On the other hand, I cannot permit Señor Del Hervalle to be seized and cast a prisoner into the coal-cellar on the spur of the minute. Once Mr. Fenton and Mr. Maitland are here to lend their added evidence to yours, then we can act, and even so there will be formalities of procedure."

"Great heavens, formalities!" I cried. "Señor Del Hervalle was not encumbered with formalities

when he trussed me up in the house yonder in the village."

"Well, what do you suggest?"

"Exactly what you mentioned. Put him in the coal-cellar until the proper officers arrive."

"And outrage every nation in South America. Even if he be a murderer, the fact remains that he's an envoy, the representative of a foreign country."

"Then he is to walk away unpunished?"

"No, I shall telegraph the particulars to Washington and request advice — and on your single unsupported word that is going far."

"I see that I'll have to take the settlement of his crimes into my own hands," I answered with chagrin.

"If —" he began, but paused.

"What?" I asked.

"Señor Del Hervalle might become a guest at your house for a week."

His words made me stare, then I caught the suggestion.

"By Jove!" I exclaimed.

"Which would enable everything to be investigated and certain necessary preliminaries arranged, depending of course upon the fact that additional evidence was produced."

"It will be forthcoming, it will be forthcoming, never fear," I stated heartily, full of new hope.

"But in the interim I must know nothing of

his visit to you. This is purely a hypothetical conjecture."

"Certainly — hypothetical let it be."

He put out his hand, and I gripped it.

"It is incredible, your story," he said with feeling. "But — and I tell you this in confidence — I've not been blind to Señor Del Hervalle; many things have passed not unobserved by me, but I never dreamt that such infamy was possible. Get your evidence together, otherwise you're ruined if you act against him."

"I'm ruined either way," said I grimly, "if I don't finish him now — I'll be ruined and possibly killed if he goes away from Lavouche free. I'm in a narrow strait and will not hesitate to go pretty far, and now I have but one thing to ask of you — insist that he be present at my trial. It's my opinion he'll want to attend without urging, in order to hearten up his villains to their work. But should he hesitate — insist."

"I will insist," said he with a smile.

Then I brought up another subject, Betty. I related the circumstances of our love for each other and begged his consent, which he gave readily. Indeed, he stated that it had been the hope of my father and himself that our families might be united through their children. Whatever was Betty's will should be his and all he desired was her happiness.

"But you're in the frying-pan at present, that's certain," he went on, "with this murder charge

hanging over you and with your other troubles. I'll be on hand to help you this afternoon, and in the mean time I'll send off some telegrams about the affair."

When I returned to the lawn, I perceived Billy in lively conversation with Betty and Muriel, and if his manner was a token of his feelings he experienced no great regret that the island of Lavouche was inhabited by such lovely beings. But then, as I afterwards had occasion to learn, the dissatisfaction which he had so often expressed at finding himself in feminine society was to be accepted with a very large pinch of salt. He had introduced himself to them as my guest and friend and had already made good progress.

"Here's a gentleman for you to take lessons from," Muriel exclaimed when I joined them. "Fifteen minutes ago we did not know each other, now we've arranged for a sail, a fishing, an excursion to the lighthouse, and an exploration in the wood, a — was n't there something else, Mr. Harrington?"

"Yes, indeed, a clam party, a dinner at the inn, and a dance at Stag Lodge."

"There, that's something like," said she with satisfaction. "Mr. Harrington is a man of ideas and gallantry. Now consider, Charles Woodworth, the little you've done to keep us amused and the much you've neglected to do. With all the opportunities —"

I lifted a protesting hand.

"What's the army for, if not to be the slaves of beautiful ladies? We poor civilians have not the training in that audacity which is part of the education of the military. Now I've heard Billy state, speaking of young ladies and islands —" I paused.

"Stop! Utter a single word and we become enemies," he said.

"I'll never believe it anyway," Muriel interjected, "and it will be a long time too before I forgive you, Charlie, for your inattention and lack of entertainment."

I bowed with mock humility.

"Seldom or never do I waste my time in trivial amusements for my friends," I replied. "It has always been my ambition to imitate the Cæsars and entertain them upon a grand scale. During all of this time, my dear young lady, I've been preparing something which will afford you nothing less than an exciting spectacle. At two o'clock this afternoon in the village —"

Betty, who had been standing by, half listening, half abstracted, sprang suddenly forward and laid her hand on my arm.

"Charlie, Charlie, don't speak so, it's dreadful. Andrew came and told me all early this morning. I can't bear to think of it!"

Muriel gazed with large eyes.

"What is it? What has happened?" she cried.

Hardly I heard her, for Betty's blue eyes, alarmed,

fearful, held mine and my attention. What is so sweet in all the world as the concern of the woman who loves you! I could feel her hand tremble on my sleeve.

"Never fear," I said cheerily. "I'll come out on top of the heap."

"But what is it?" Muriel repeated in bewilderment; then turning to Billy, said, "Mr. Harrington, if you don't tell me what all this mystery is, I'll do something desperate."

Harrington was embarrassed; he looked at me, at the wood, at Muriel.

"Go ahead, Billy," I said.

"Well, the entertainment which Woodworth has prepared for your delectation," he explained, "is a murder investigation in which he figures as the murderer. Perhaps, Miss Muriel, I on my part shall later succeed in producing a thriller."

She shot a lightning flash of her eyes at him. Next it appeared as if a shower of tears would follow.

"And I've talked so horrid about you while you were in trouble. Oh, forgive me, Mr. Woodworth. Why will my tongue always chatter!"

Her penitence was genuine. I told her I liked what she called her "chatter," and gradually she was comforted. But for Billy she seemed to retain a spark of resentment; he had spoken lightly of my trouble and she would forgive neither herself nor him. I was a noble man, she said, to bear her

gibes when she rattled on thoughtlessly, but Billy Harrington — to get so far as "Billy" even when uttered in indignation was proceeding famously.

"Come, it's a foggy morning. Let's you, I, and the weather weep together," Billy said pleasantly.

"You — you awful man!" she gasped.

Betty drew me a little way on one side.

"I shall come," she said firmly. "I shall come and stand up before them all and tell them you are innocent. The cowards to try to kill you! To tie you up and murder you! I shudder when I think of it! Andrew informed me of all that happened, and though I'm only a girl I gloried in you when he told how you escaped and fought that terrible fight on the sands. Oh, I was sick at heart to remember that I went up the street, looking everywhere while you were standing before the window a prisoner. Had I known, I'd have torn down the walls with my hands. And now that I have you, they shall do you no further harm!"

"God will see to that," said I, and to the astonishment of the other two I drew her into my arms and kissed her. What cared we for others, Betty and I, since our hearts were united?

"Betty Moore! And you never told me!" Muriel cried, then ran and kissed her, which is one way women express emotion.

Billy clasped my hand, gripping it hard.

"Win a fight one day and the girl you love the next, that's luck to the limit," he whispered.

They were not the only observers of the little scene, for at that moment Señor Del Hervalle chanced to stroll out from the house. He hurried forward, both hands extended, face beaming with ineffable joy.

"Your happiness is mine," he said. "Youth and beauty, it is what the world loves to see — and lovers! I give you a thousand wishes for a happy future." His fingers pressed ours affectionately — I saw a little shudder pass over Betty. "It is a day to remember; may every joy continue as yours, Miss Elizabeth, forever. My dear Charles, I can scarcely express my delight at your good fortune, *mon Dieu*, no!"

"I know your sentiments are sincere," said I shortly.

"Yes, yes; you are young, strong, wealthy, fortunate. Your days will be long, my son, and I shall think of you with great happiness. Would that I had such a son, would that I had had such a daughter! I am touched, enchanted."

My emotion at this splendid exhibition of friendship was too great for reply. I could only gaze dumbly at those shining eyes, that benevolent brow, that round, uplifted, glorified face.



## CHAPTER XVIII

### A SHOT IN THE WOOD

At one o'clock that day D'Urville struck his last blow at my life. The miscarriage of his plot of the previous night and the knowledge I had of the character of this enemy should, now that the hour had come when my fate was to be decided by the village, have kept me more than ever upon my guard; lulled however by the belief that he would leave my affair to the judgment of the fishermen, that he would confidently think to swear me into guilt by a chain of perjury, I relaxed caution. One o'clock — one hour until the assemblage of Lavouche in old Gaspard's boat-shop — surely I could feel myself safe for that interval! Yet it would have been simple, had I reasoned the matter, to know that the Frenchman could feel his situation naught but desperate. Swear me into a murder he might, make out Descarte a hero perhaps, but during the process of investigation might I not bring forth a damaging tale of D'Urville himself? I should have remembered the character of the man, I have said; he was not the one to leave any affair of his to public arbitrament; that were to leave it to chance, and in such a matter chance should be excluded.

It was at one o'clock then that I was walking back and forth upon the lawn with Andrew. His fond hope to see me the betrothed of Elizabeth had at last been realized; when I had told him the news, it was a joy to see the bloom of happiness that came upon his cheek. We were speaking of the event. To him almost I would have spoken my innermost thoughts as to a father. We entered a little way upon the path where that morning I had met Betty. I pointed a finger up its alley and turned to him. Suddenly he halted abruptly in the words of satisfaction which he uttered, half lifted a hand, startled, then with a loud cry he flung himself as a shield before my body.

"The Frenchman —"

His words were never finished. A shot rang through the wood, clear, loud, vindictive, and Andrew caught his breath with a sobbing gasp. Whirling about, I had an instant vision of a man's figure, the flutter of a coat skirt, then nothing was to be seen. Andrew stood with his hand to his left breast, blood slipping between his fingers.

"I am hit, Master Charles," he said with pale lips.

He began to sway. Catching his form in my arms, I lowered him tenderly to the ground. Horror filled my mind, horror and an immense disbelief that what happened could be true. Andrew shot; good, faithful, innocent Andrew, who had fearlessly flung himself forward to protect me! I took a few rapid steps to pursue the villain who had fired this

assassin's shot from ambush; then the thought that my good friend, my old companion, was perhaps losing his life's blood overwhelmed me. I fell on my knees by his side, I sought to staunch the welling blood with my handkerchief. Oh that this faithful servitor should suffer for my quarrel! Then a rage of murder filled my heart. Let what might happen, I should kill D'Urville, if it were with my last breath. Beside Andrew's unconscious body under the green boughs where the sunlight played hide and seek, and with the restored silence all about us, I swore it looking up to heaven.

Harrington had heard the shot as he sat upon the veranda. Casting aside his magazine, he leaped upon the turf and raced to me, shouting. In a few swift words I explained what had happened; as swiftly he opened the old man's clothes and made an examination. Truly the army trains men to cope with emergencies.

"We must take him into the house and to bed," he said. "Through the lung — a dangerous wound. A surgeon must be had at once. He has half a chance."

Into the Lodge therefore we bore Andrew, with as little physical jar as might be. My guest brought into operation his knowledge of "first aid" to stop the hemorrhage and succeeded finally in checking the flow of blood. With each succeeding minute my cold rage against Del Hervalles grew, my passion to revenge the wanton crime darkened. Time

seemed to fly. At last I must go to the village, for the clock was hard on two, and with a last look at the white face, white now as the disordered hair above it, which lay upon the pillow, with a final grip of the hand from Billy, who remained, I placed my hat on my head and set out for Lavouche. Through the wood I strode, now knowing no fear. Something told me I was not to fall by a hidden blow, and had I sighted the man who had committed that outrage against my servant I would have throttled him without mercy or compunction. Past tree, bush, and vine I went, yesterday so light with happiness, now heavy with the tragedy in which they were shrouded. No bird notes fell in music through the branches; as if to typify the mood in men's minds, the fog spread its darkening veil, trees dripped, and all was somber.

When I emerged from the wood and walked up the hundred yards or so of sands to the village, I perceived the shadowy forms of the boats standing where they had rested since the previous evening. What an age had passed since the few hours back when I looked into the blazing eyes of Descarte seeking my life there among their inanimate hulls! Like a hideous nightmare the memory of that struggle assailed me. One instant he had been alive, vicious, powerful, strangling the breath in my throat, next he lay an inert sprawling mass at which Esper and I stared unbelieving. The tide was now out. *The Throat* displayed its empty stretch of

sands, here and there a nearer pool faintly visible, the others hidden in fog; overhead and unseen wheeled a few gulls squalling their raucous, mournful cries; while strong in my nostrils was the scent of brine and sea. A sense of loneliness, of weariness, of desolation came over me. All the world seemed barren and life a useless struggle, man somehow caught in a mesh of Fate from which there was no escape.

Awaiting me some distance nearer the village was that good friend Jean. His face was sober, but his greeting sincere, which was all that I cared for, and when he clapped me on the shoulder while asking how I was, it was with a smile. My news dumfounded him.

"Andrew shot!"

"Through the lung — it is serious. You must find some one, Jean, to go to the railway station with a message for a doctor, some one who is trustworthy, who is intelligent enough to spur the operator to instant action and to see that the telegram is sent."

"Wait here," said he, and hurried away.

While I bided his return I wrote the message on a leaf of my notebook to a banker in Bangor with whom my father had formerly conducted certain business while spending summers here on the island. Urgency was essential, I stated, at the same time ordering him to hire a special train or fast tug. The telegram finished, I could only think of poor

Andrew and pray that a surgeon might come speedily. A moment later Jean's shape took form out of the fog and with it that of Louis Milan, a sturdy youth of quick wit. Him I bid run all the way to the railroad station. Could he do it? Louis laughed; two miles was nothing. I placed money in his hand. How soon could he reach the station? In twenty-five minutes of hard running. Then I told him twenty dollars should be his reward, did he do so. He opened his eyes wide.

"I will reach it in but twenty minutes," he cried, "but I am sorry to miss the investigation."

Instantly clutching the paper, he darted out across the sands of *The Throat* and disappeared. That much was accomplished.

"And now, Jean?" I said.

"Lavouche is assembled and awaits you. I told Surçon the mayor that you were come and desired a few minutes to review in private the defense you would make." And Jean smiled ironically.

"Is Señor Del Hervalle in attendance?"

"He is present. Also Pilon, Esper, and every living thing upon the isle of Lavouche, save you and I and the crows."

"What of Esper?" I inquired anxiously.

"At noon I pulled him by the sleeve, 'What will thy tale be?' I asked. 'The tale Señor Del Hervalle invented for you, or the truth?' He looked down his nose. 'Señor Del Hervalle has paid something, not so much as he should, but something. He

is a very hard orange to squeeze.' 'How much, little rogue?' I asked. '*Peste*, only a little three hundred.' Then I said, 'You have taken blood money. If you utter not the truth when the proper time comes to speak, I, Jean, will kill you.' I caught him by the throat, turning up his chin with my thumb, so that his eyes looked into mine and not down his nose. 'I, Jean, will slay you immediately.' But he did not say what he would speak; probably I shall have to kill him."

Jean spoke in a matter-of-fact tone. There was no doubt in my mind but that Esper was slated for death if he mouthed Del Hervalle's invention. Little Esper as well as myself, it seemed, was in a predicament. On the one hand were Del Hervalle and Pilon, who would stop at nothing to revenge themselves if he convicted them of a conspiracy; on the other, were Jean and I, who if he did not would cut short his career. It was with a sinking heart that I heard Jean's news. The little villain had sold himself for three hundred dollars, undoubtedly reasoning that while death was a certainty from his employer and his companion, it was only a dangerous probability from Jean and myself.

"Things look bad for me, Jean, unless —" I stopped.

"Unless what, Charles?"

"I was going to say, unless Heaven intercedes."

"What Heaven will do is not known," he replied grimly. "I however am here."

"Ah, Jean, you are in truth a friend in need."

"Were we not the same as brothers when we played in this sand?" He spoke with a lofty severity and moved his hand in an embracing gesture. "Did we not sail together, divide our bread between us, share our joys and our sorrows? Wherefore should I draw away now? I know that you are innocent."

Noble as I knew him to be, this implicit trust, this unquestioning loyalty, affected me as nothing else at the moment could have done. It was as if the sun had burst through the clouds and driven them away; the depression which had rested upon my spirits vanished and I was my confident self again. Of all the village, save old Gaspard and one other whom I knew not of but who was soon to step forth, he was the one person to stand by me unswervingly.

"You're worth a thousand," I said. "Come, let us proceed with the business and get it over."

It would be foolish to say that I was not wrought up at what lay before me. Outwardly my friends tell me I appeared calm, but let any man stand where I stood and his nerves would be on edge, his mind tense. Fear had nothing to do with it, my conscience was clear; yet to be on trial, informal and unofficial as it was, to have one's honor and integrity at stake, to face an overwhelming fabrication of evidence, to know that perjured testimony would convict you, that your defense was as slender



and incredible as a mirage, that condemnation here meant arrest and trial by constituted authority later on, which meant in turn to have your name ring over the country as a monster of iniquity — to know all this when at the same time knowing your innocence was enough to set anxiety heavy on one's head. Men walk to the tribunal with cool pulses, we read, but if their situation be desperate I doubt it. And to my own worries was added that of Andrew. How did he fare, I asked myself over and over, did he yet hold to life?

As has already been stated, old Gaspard's house was at the end of the street, the entire lower floor comprising one room in which he conducted his business of making and mending boats. Since it was the largest room in the village, it had been chosen, as was commonly the case for all communal meetings, as the place in which to make the investigation into Descarte's death and my alleged crime. In length the boat-shop was some fifty or sixty feet, in width half as much, into which space I perceived upon arriving that most of the village was packed. With that practical foresight which was a strong characteristic of the fishermen and their spouses they had brought stools and chairs on which they disposed themselves, leaving an aisle through the middle. Those who had not been so thoughtful or would not grow weary of standing were grouped in the rear, and these crowded the shop to the door.

My heart beat faster as I made my way through the group of men about the door, who separated to let me within; for now the moment had come. Some nodded or bade me good day; the most part remained silent and curious. The rear of the shop had been converted by old Gaspard into a sort of judge's rostrum; three boats bottom-up formed the foundation, while planks laid upon these constituted a rude platform. On this had been set a table where Gaspard, who despite his gnarled fingers could write a fair hand, had established himself with a pot of ink, a quill pen, and a sheaf of paper. He, it seemed, would fulfill the rôle of clerk, as he did on occasions of importance. Beside him sat the mayor, sunburnt, bearded, solid, grave. Indeed the whole assemblage was grave — men, women, and children, if I count not Pilon, who twirled his moustache, and Esper, who smiled his uncertain smile. Before the platform there had been left an open space to facilitate the passage of witnesses.

I took my seat upon the front row beside Betty; her hand stole into mine and rested there. After a moment I cast a look about. Opposite and in front were Pilon, Esper, madame the inn-woman knitting as ever, her ragamuffin boy at her side, and two or three of the staid advisers whom Surçon had been accustomed to call into counsel and who now lent him the weight of their presence. With me were Betty, Muriel, Mr. Moore, Stevens, Señor Del Her valle, and his secretary. Jean leaned against the

wall by the platform, erect, silent, immobile, arms folded.

"Margot has gone, left Lavouche," Betty whispered. "I went to seek her, for her word would be, oh, so much."

I knit my brows.

"Gone has she?"

"Jean told me. But I am here — I will speak." And she set her lips with determination.

I pressed her hand softly. Her unsupported word would accomplish little, but I would not tell her so; her love was great and that sufficed me.

Behind us the fisher folk whispered in low voices, now and again a man's heavy tone breaking forth with distinctness. Every detail of the room was photographed by my momentarily supersensitive vision; the shavings underfoot, the carpenter's tools hung on pegs about the walls, strips of planking, boat-ribs, poles for masts, oars, and all the lumber of Gaspard's trade, stored on frames above our heads. The clear sweet scent of new boards filled the room; from far away there came the subdued thunder of surf. Everything smacked of the sea.

Old Gaspard's little wrinkled face was screwed in sorrowful lines. He sharpened his pen, arranged and rearranged his ink pot and paper, but never to his satisfaction; finally he stepped off the platform to come and shake my hand. For once his tongue was silent, he opened his lips only to shut them together again, then turned, climbed upon the boards,

and resumed his seat. He and Surçon held a low consultation, the upshot of which was that two additional chairs were placed beside the table, one for use by successive witnesses and one for Mr. Moore, who was invited to lend the mayor his advice. Murmured expressions about the room approved this; Mr. Moore was wise in the ways of investigations, he was an official of the government. What could be better? For there would be much to talk about and much to investigate and many to interrogate. Two heads would be better than one, meaning no disrespect to Surçon's head.

Presently I discovered a little by-play that at any other time would have been entertaining but now was dramatic. Glancing at Jean, I perceived he gazed steadily across the room. In the position which he occupied he was a lone and commanding figure; thus might have stood a young gladiator against a Coliseum wall awaiting his turn to enter the arena. Following his unchanging look, I saw that it rested upon Esper; the little fellow sat with Pilon on one side and the knitting inn-woman on the other. That he was well aware of the stern eyes bent upon him was evident from the furtive glances which he shot back at Jean; that he was uncomfortable beneath the look I could only guess — first he would look awhile down his nose, smiling craftily, then steal a glimpse at the fisherman out of the corner of his eye; and so the interchange continued. Why Jean had selected his present position was

apparent only to Esper and me — it was one of menace.

All at once another person entered into the mute play. The inn-woman stopped in her knitting, plucked Esper by the elbow, and drew him nearer. A few words were whispered in his ear; he turned his head about, perking at her for all the world like a bird; again she whispered, afterwards nodding at him with compressed, significant lips. The little man's look wandered up and about the ceiling while his smile flickered absently. Whatever she had said, it had caused cogitation in his brain. Finally she released his sleeve, resumed her needles, and he scratched his nose a longer time than usual.

Del Hervalles chatted complacently with Muriel, and as I watched him the black anger again welled in my heart. He was the wretch who had sought to kill me, to cause my death while suspicion hung over my head, to send me into a grave with a dishonored name. His time would come, I said to myself, when he should suffer for his crimes, else the whole world was out of joint and there was no such thing as justice.

At that minute Surçon rapped with his knuckles on the table. The investigation was open.

## CHAPTER XIX

### LAVOUCHE INVESTIGATES

Surçon the fisherman wore the rough shirt common to the coast; Surçon the mayor wore an uncomfortable white-bosomed one and a low collar. Rapping upon the table, he commanded silence and made a statement. Since the map was the beginning of the trouble which had befallen their peaceful island and interrupted the orderly pursuit of their fishing industry, and since it was alleged that Descarte had been slain in an effort to prevent me from selling the same to the German stranger who had disappeared, it was necessary to examine into the affair of the map in order to get a proper understanding of the cause of Descarte's death. On the suggestion therefore of Monsieur the Honorable Alexander Moore, who had consented to assist him and who now sat by his elbow as all could see, he would proceed with an investigation upon this subject. Would Charles Woodworth ascend the platform? I did so, seating myself upon the chair provided for witnesses, while the assemblage gazed at me, silent, eager, expectant.

"You have or had in your possession a map of

fishermen loved a jest. As for the fellow himself he stroked his moustache fiercely. "The assistant engineer had, as I thought, stolen into a German fortress and drawn the map to sell to another country. The notes were in German, therefore it must be a German map. When we came to depart from the mine, my friend the manager took the sword and gave me the map as a memento. Once arrived in New York I locked it away and forgot it utterly."

"Then your friends saw the map? Monsieur, kindly give Gaspard their names that he may enter them in the account."

I did so, together with their residences.

"Proceed, Monsieur Woodworth."

"The past two years I spent in Texas. A short time ago I returned to New York by steamer and had the map recalled to mind by a newspaper item which my friend, Lieutenant William Harrington, read. I mentioned that I possessed a map of a fort; he was coming to visit me here and as he's an army officer, he begged me to bring it with me so that he could examine it. Is it likely, good people of Lavouche" — I sat forward and spread my hand in a questioning gesture — "is it likely that I was trying to betray my country when the army of the United States knew of the existence of the map, the army in the person of Lieutenant Harrington?"

My audience was impressed. They looked at one another with lifted brows. The old men blinked,

considered, weighed the statement. Meanwhile Gaspard's pen scratched busily.

"But the German, that does not appear at all clear," Surçon said judicially.

"It is simple, Monsieur the Mayor. As I rode hither on the train, I sat with the map outspread upon my knees. This stranger passing in the aisle observed it. He stopped; he being also an army man saw that it was a map of a fortress and that there was writing in his own language. He demanded to see it, which I refused. That night he attempted to steal it from me on the train, but was unsuccessful, and he followed me. Just north of the rock of *La Dent* he made an attack upon my person and I knocked him down with a stiff punch of the fist. Then he remained in the village waiting a further chance to obtain it."

"But you were friendly. Even he has eaten at your table."

"Yes, we were friendly as two dogs who watch to have the same bone, not barking but with teeth ready to bite. It amused me to invite him to dinner, knowing all the while that he wanted to rob me. It was the same as when Antoine and Pierre, burning to maul one another for love of the same maiden, yet greet each other with exceeding politeness."

A shout of laughter greeted my explanation. Heads turned towards the two striplings, who sat with downcast eyes, blushing, for the rivalry of the pair was a great joke in Lavouche.



"There was a third party to this affair of the map," I went on. "By accident Señor Del Hervallo discovered that I was in possession of the paper. The Señor is a diplomat, also a patriot of his country who desires to protect his government." I spoke with irony. "He did me the honor to call one day at Stag Lodge during my absence in order to persuade my servant Andrew to give him the paper. What Venezuela would do with a map of a German fortress I do not know. The ways of great countries and of their honorable representatives are not for us simple people to understand. At any rate he desired to obtain possession of the chart. When he failed in this, he sought out Pilon to help him, and Pilon spread a report that it was a French map which I was endeavoring to sell to Germany. Thus the Señor thought perhaps to frighten me into giving it to him — that is no doubt diplomacy. It was because of this tale Monsieur the Mayor and the committee called upon me and afterwards set a watch upon my movements as well as upon those of the German. When the latter stated to the committee who visited my house that he was here in Lavouche on account of the map, he spoke truly, but not, I regret to state, with the meaning the committee understood. It was not to buy, but to steal the map."

When I paused in my declaration, there was a look of wonder upon the people. Many eyes were directed at Señor Del Hervallo, who sat unper-

turbed; many were focused on me. Their curiosity was being fed to the utmost; it was a wonderful day.

"Do you desire to enter the names of the committee, Monsieur the Mayor?" Gaspard inquired politely.

"Yes, indeed. Nothing must be omitted which may be important. Truly, there must not. Does Monsieur Woodworth know the name of the stranger?"

"Baron von Hussman," I informed him.

"That too must be entered. According to the report the map was sold to the German last night and he has departed with it. At least he has gone from the village. What have you to say of that, monsieur?"

"By whom is it declared that the map was sold?"

"Pilon."

From his seat the fellow spoke up.

"That is true. The German has gone, the map has gone with him. France is betrayed; it is enough." And he leaned back, giving a satisfied upward twirl to his moustache.

"Pilon is a wise man," said I scornfully. "Perhaps he can tell how the German departed." On this point however he had nothing to say. "In order that everything may be clear, I will tell you. Last night about ten o'clock my guest, Lieutenant Harrington, who arrived in the evening, and I were surprised at my house by this stranger and a com-

panion of his. They compelled us to go with them on board a vessel which they had anchored close to the island under cover of the fog. It was their intention to land us upon the beach ten miles below in order to enable them to make a good start with the map before warning of their crime could be given. But while making an examination of the map the German discovered that it was not one of a fortress of his country at all, but of an American one. So my friend and I were returned to Lavouche, whereupon the yacht sailed away. As you know, there is no name upon the map. I had supposed it German because of the writing. The Baron, who is a gentleman and officer high in the councils of his country and who is a student of fortresses the world over, perceived from certain technical features that it was American. He may have known the exact fort, but he did not say so."

"Then you have the map?"

"Certainly, here it is." I drew it forth from my pocket and opened it to the gaze of all.

"What do you propose to do with it?"

"Turn it over to the authorities at Washington, to be sure."

Surçon meditated. He consulted with Mr. Moore.

"Will you swear that you have no intention of selling it? And will you deliver it to Mr. Moore to be given to the President?"

"To the first question, I will answer yes; to the second I can only answer in the affirmative on the

condition that Lieutenant Harrington consents. I promised to give it to my friend to carry to Washington, for it would perhaps enable him to win promotion."

"Ah, where is he?" the mayor inquired.

"Both he and Andrew are detained at Stag Lodge."

At this moment Pilon rose to his feet, asking permission to speak. When it was granted, he cast an insolent look at me and said that it was a very cunning tale that I had woven to hoodwink the villagers, but that he would put a finger through it in as many places as in a fish net. Where I had got the map, he did not care, but my whole account was an unlikely story. The German had been here, that was certain, every one had seen him, and what he wanted to know, did men sit down to eat together and smoke each other's tobacco and laugh at jests if they were fighting for the same thing? No, *mon Dieu!* They fought with hands and knives if they were in earnest. The committee had seen the map and heard the German say that his business at Lavouche concerned it. Let them remember that morning. Had the German and I acted as enemies act? Name of a dog, we were almost brothers. For that reason Monsieur the Mayor and the other worthy men with whom he consulted had set Esper and poor dead Descarte to watch us. As for the slander that the honorable gentleman who was a guest at Moore House had tried to steal the paper, that was a lie.

"Where is your servant, Andrew?" the mayor interrupted, turning to me. "His evidence is necessary."

"As I've already stated, he can't be present," I answered shortly.

"And for a very good reason," Pilon continued, since he was probably hand in glove with his master but was afraid to appear here before Lavouche; same with the fellow who I said was a lieutenant. Where also was he? Perhaps he had come to the island, but if so it was because he was also a rascal like myself and was to get some of the money for the map. The German was gone, but he could return for the paper, as no doubt he had arranged to do. *Sacré*, it was an evil business to betray France thus! He and Esper and Descarte had worked to stop it — and Descarte had died because of it. I had told a fine story, but there was no one to prove it. Naturally I would tell a fine falsehood, naturally I would swear a lie in order to save my neck.

With a flourish of his hands he sat down, turning with an air of satisfaction to look over the audience. That it was warranted was only too evident; men nodded approval and women whispered together while glancing my way. Truly, my story was unsupported and my witnesses absent; probably, as Pilon said, it was a lie; for had I not been friendly with the German, who was an enemy of France? Were enemies in truth ever friendly? There was no

one to say that the map was American, no one besides myself. It was very strange an American map should have been written in German, but not at all strange that a French map made to sell across the Rhine should be so written. A buzz went throughout the room, and now and again I could catch a word to show me their thoughts. The slightly favorable impression which I had won by my account had been rapidly dispelled by Pilon, to leave in its stead one distinctly inimical to my interests.

I gazed at Betty. Her lips were firmly set, her eyes blazed scorn. When her look met mine, she smiled a smile of steadfast trust. As for the others they displayed various feelings: Muriel sat with lips parted, staring straight ahead of her, wonder upon her face, wonder that a drama had been played upon the island almost before her sight and she had seen it not; Señor Del Hervalle was complacent, almost indifferent; Davis, the secretary, sat immobile, only his eyes betokening eagerness of attention; rubbing elbows with him was Stevens, the man of Moore House, who remained stolid and unblinking. Jean leaned against the wall eying Esper, and Esper smiled down his nose, while Pilon, now that he had shot a first arrow, sat back enjoying his triumph, and the inn-woman knitted on as if alone.

"Monsieur Woodworth, with your permission I will look over the notes to see that no points have been omitted," Surçon said.

"Certainly," said I.

As I have already stated numberless times, what Señor Del Hervalle next would do was always the unexpected. Possibly he perceived that I was bound to link his name with my defense, it was inevitable, possibly he only thought to disarm any statement which I should make concerning him. He rose all at once, bowed to the mayor, to myself, and to the people, and begged the favor of a few words.

I had mentioned his name, he stated thoughtfully, and while he was a disinterested spectator and an envoy from another country, a mere visitor to America under the protection extended to foreign officials by the United States, yet he did not wish any shadow of misconduct to rest upon his name. That he had discovered by accident that I possessed a map of one of France's fortresses was true; how or where I had obtained it was a marvel which only I could explain. While Venezuela was his adopted country, yet his heart was with mother France. He had called upon me to persuade me to return the map to Paris and save the honor of the French people, had talked with my servant, talked with me, but found me obstinate. Of the German he knew nothing, save that he had been present upon the island. When I first met him, Señor Del Hervalle, I had apparently mistaken him for some other person, but that he had never beheld me before coming to Lavouche was a fact, because he had been in Venezuela for five years, as Mr. Moore, his host, could testify. He had often talked with me, attempt-

ing to disabuse my mind of my error of mistaken identity, but it had persisted. Not only had it persisted, it had increased. I associated him with strange happenings in a district somewhere far west, of which he had never heard. My stories were strange and violent. He had liked me, Charles. I was strong and handsome. But — he paused, looking at the floor, while his fat little face grew sad — but he had come to the conclusion after much observation that I was the victim of an hallucination in which I conceived many strange impossible things. Because of this perhaps there had risen the confusion of the map and the killing of the man; his regret and sorrow were profound, his mouth would never have opened to speak these words were it not necessary for the defense of his own honor as an ambassador of Venezuela and because of his love for France. Ah, his love for *la belle France* was undying. And I, what I said must be considered with respect to the circumstances — I appeared, God help me, to have just a touch of madness. And spreading his coat tails he sat down, folded his fat little arms, and rested his chin upon his breast in compassion.

Betty stared at him with horrified eyes; her father scrutinized his own pink finger-nails carefully. The fisher folk sat silent with open mouths.

"The honorable envoy's distinguished regrets should be recorded," said I dryly. "Lavouche will have something to treasure." And I saw a ghost of a smile on Mr. Moore's lips.



"That is true. Enter that the gentleman believes Monsieur Woodworth mad," Surçon ordered.

Señor Del Hervalle lifted a gentle protesting hand, but ventured no further speech.

"It is to be regretted that we have not the presence of your friend the lieutenant and of your servant to complete the testimony concerning the map," the mayor continued, consulting the papers before him. "Is there good reason for their absence?"

"Very."

"Possibly you would wish to enter the reason in the record. All should be complete and in order, thus we can form a correct opinion."

"As you like," said I.

But the mayor turned to the boat-maker.

"Take a fresh sheet, Clerk Gaspard. Now, Monsieur Woodworth, we are ready."

I looked over the audience and out of the door, with my thoughts flashing across the island to my old servant, my friend and companion, who lay senseless and wounded sorely.

"At one o'clock this afternoon Andrew and I stood in the wood behind my house," I said quietly. "We were talking together when suddenly he flung himself before me with a cry of warning. A shot sounded; the ball struck him. He lies at the point of death in Stag Lodge, attended by Lieutenant Harrington. He may now be dead. If so, he gave his life to save mine from enemies who are too cowardly

to fight in the open. Is that sufficient reason for his absence, Monsieur the Mayor?"

This was news indeed. The whole assembly, save Señor Del Hervalle, opened their eyes at this information. Betty uttered a low cry, Pilon ceased to twist his moustache and remained with it between finger and thumb while he stared, madame the inn-keeper's needles halted. Then a murmur swept the room of the boat-shop, a low utterance of astonishment. Andrew shot from ambush, perhaps dead! Sensation was in truth piling on top of sensation.

"It is an excellent reason," the mayor stated gravely. "You are excused, monsieur, and I offer you in this particular the sympathy of the whole village."

As I descended to my seat, a buzz of wonder and conjecture awoke in the room. The map was forgotten; all minds were stuffed with this fresh happening.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE TALE THAT PILON TOLD

At about three o'clock Pilon was called to the stand to give his account of my alleged crime. While an examination into the subject of the map was essential, this was the main purpose of the investigation. There was a shifting closer of seats, a settling of bodies, a craning of heads, a breath of suppressed excitement. Old Gaspard whittled his quill pen anew for larger writing. Pilon, full of confidence, swelling with importance now that he was the center of observation, pulled the witness chair a little way about on the platform, cocked his head on one side and gazed up at the ceiling, awaiting the pleasure of the mayor.

Surçon announced that Descarte was dead; there could be no doubt on that point, for he lay in the lower room of Pilon's house, where he had been viewed by many. Yes, it was certain that he was dead. Of the instrument of his death there also was no question, since the knife which had slain him still remained in his back. It was charged that I had murdered him. Therefore the cause and nature of the killing were to be determined. Hence this investigation.

Pilon was ordered to speak.

"Monsieur Woodworth is guilty and a great rascal," said he complacently.

The mayor rapped the table.

"You're not to pass judgment, but to give evidence. Begin at the beginning."

"Where is the beginning, Monsieur the Mayor?" Pilon inquired with calmness.

That was in truth a question, unless we were to start over again with my arrival upon the island. However, after musing on the matter briefly, Surçon said the witness should begin with the morning when a watch was set upon the movements of the German and me.

"That is agreeable, Monsieur the Mayor," the witness stated, not neglecting his moustache. "It was upon consultation of the committee who visited Monsieur Woodworth, and after they had beheld the German stranger come on his own legs to make a bargain with him, that it was decided to watch the pair and prevent the sale of the map. I, Pilon, suggested this. Had not this man Woodworth attempted to knock out my brains with an oar and pursued me even to the village? Therefore to watch him and the German was wise. And therefore Pilon suggested Esper and Descarte, because they were skillful, loyal, and loved France; and they were chosen. All of one day they kept guard. It is true that monsieur the prisoner" — this was rather anticipating facts — "sought to bribe Esper; it is

Pilon pulled his moustache furiously.

"*Mille de nom d'un chien!* Am I to tell the story, or am I not?" he cried.

"It is perfectly proper that madame take exception."

Pilon glared about. "Well, one cannot be expected to speak easily when a chattering woman buzzes like a fly on a window. As I was saying, the stranger was to meet Monsieur the prisoner at the boats. There was no time to run to the mayor, to warn the village. 'Come, my comrades,' said I, 'we will save France, we three. Her honor is our honor. Come, we are her sons.'" A pause followed this sentiment, while he rolled his eyes about for approval. "We ran into the street. The fog was yellow with the moon. 'To the boats!' said I. Thither we ran, I leading. But when we reached them no one was to be seen and we walked all among them, looking in their hulls and among the sails and at the shadows, but no, *mon Dieu!* they had not come. 'Stand thou here, Descarte—and thou here, Esper,' said I, leading him to another spot. Then I went to a third place. He who saw them first was to whistle twice, but not until they had come together so we could catch them and make them prisoners and save France."

"This was at what hour?" Mr. Moore asked.

"About eight, monsieur."

A third time the inn-woman interrupted.

"Pilon entered the inn a little before nine to purchase a flask of brandy," she announced.

"Eight or nine, I know not!" he exclaimed angrily. "I do not sit knitting with my eye on a clock. How should I know!"

"Continue," the Mayor ordered.

"*Peste*, if I am allowed! We waited for a long time, so long that I went to Esper and said, 'Art thou certain they will come, little one?' and Esper said that Monsieur Woodworth had stated the hour named, only that much he knew, whereupon I went back to my station. 'It will be a long wait, possibly,' thought I, 'and Pilon may grow chilly. He had better go to the inn and purchase some brandy.' It is no doubt to that visit madame referred." He smiled, pleased with himself at this cunning explanation. "When I returned, I halted at the end of the street, outside this boat-house to warm me with a drink of the brandy. I raised the flask to my lips. Just then I heard a whistle. The bottle dropped from my fingers. I stood harking."

"One minute, Pilon," Mr. Moore addressed him, then turned to Gaspard. "Did you find a broken bottle before your door this morning?"

"No, monsieur."

Pilon burst into laughter.

"That would not be, a broken bottle. For I caught it before it struck the stones of the street."

"While you were listening?"

"Just before, monsieur. I am very quick. Still holding it in my hand, I sprang forward to the boats. At first I could see nothing. I shouted and shouts answered me, yet they were uncertain and the night was full of the yellow fog, so I ran to and fro furious to be in the *mêlée*. All at once I heard a noise on my left, further down where I had placed Descarte. I, Pilon, leaped towards the spot. Alas, a rope lay on the sand, it tripped me. Again I hurried forward—to behold what! That poor Descarte struggling, then monsieur stabbed him in the back so that with a dreadful cry my comrade fell on the sand murdered. Meanwhile the German held a pistol to Esper's head. Then the two of them pursued us; we had but knives, while they were armed with a revolver and a club. They followed us even to the door of my house, which I succeeded barely in shutting as their feet fell on the sill."

"And the brandy?"

"Ha, that was strange! I never once let go of it, never knowing it was in my hand until I found it there when we were safe in the house."

"Remember, Pilon, it is not yet paid for," the inn-woman warned him.

"*Nom de nom de nom*, are you there still!" he shouted.

"Do you know where Charles Woodworth was during the day of yesterday?" Mr. Moore questioned.

"Not of my own knowledge, monsieur. At his house, I suppose. Esper can tell you."

"You did not see him until night?"

"No."

"Why did you not alarm the village after this fight?"

"These men were at the door, monsieur, and armed."

His answers were given promptly; it was apparent he had rehearsed them. Only in the matter of the brandy and the day's surveillance of the German and me had he been taken off guard; the first point he had later mended, the latter he ignored. And it was apparent that he had now found favor with the fisher folk in the account which he gave, for the comments, though not intended for my ears but nevertheless reaching them, made so much plain.

"It is infamous, infamous!" Betty whispered to me. "Can men stand up and declare such falsehoods!"

"Pilon finds no trouble doing it," said I.

All the assurance in the world was his. He had now got through his invented tale, the worst was over and he perceived that Lavouche was with him. Crossing his legs, he stared at me with unconcerned insolence; the flush brought to his face by the inspiration of his narrative still remained, darkening his swarthy skin and making his countenance more sinister. Del Hervalle had found him a willing, aye, an eager tool, who would do much for money and



more for hate. What he had begun, Esper no doubt would finish. In the minds of the fishermen I would stand convicted as a seller of maps and as a murderer.

"Do you charge Charles Woodworth with murder of this man, Descarte?" Mr. Moore asked slowly.

"I do, monsieur."

"That is sufficient, take your seat. Monsieur the Mayor, let us hear what refutation Woodworth has to make."

Again I mounted the platform. The charge had now been made, and as I looked into the faces gazing up at me I could find no friendliness there, no sympathy, no belief in my integrity, only curiosity and distrust and grave somberness. If my story of the map had seemed far-fetched, what would be the opinion of the narration which I was about to relate? Pilon's account had all the advantages of simplicity, brevity, plausibility, while mine involved so many romantic occurrences, so extraordinary a procession of events, that I felt that it would convict me out of hand either as a liar or, as Del Hervalle intimated, a madman. Betty's wistful look was unnerving too. Well, I could only tell as straightforward a story as possible, then let happen what would. Only at Stevens' face I paused. He sat, as he had all the while, straight, expressionless, but with the corners of his mouth drawn down in a hint of sardonic humor. Then his eyes met mine

and — was it in truth so? — one of the lids winked the barest wink in the world. A ray of something — hope, confidence, cheer — flashed into my heart. What it meant, I knew not; but that it indicated something he had — knowledge, information, support — I felt to my very bones.

“My father came to this island years ago,” I said in a clear voice, addressing the people. “I, on my part, played on these sands as a lad and sailed in the boats with you as a youth. In all that time did any one of you know me to do a dishonest or a dishonorable thing? Yet knowing this, you have believed the first tale this quarreler, this brawler, this drunken braggart Pilon told you, a stranger himself in Lavouche and no doubt with a past he dare not allow light to shine upon. Why, let me ask, should I sell this map? For money? I have more money now than I know what to do with; as is well known to you, my father possessed wealth which I have inherited. The charge that I wished to sell this map to a foreigner is false and I now give it to Mr. Moore to return to our government. Of all the village of Lavouche, only two that I am aware of have believed in me, stood by me and been my friends. Others of you with whom I have broken bread have first suspected and then believed evil of me without ever giving me the benefit of a doubt. I shall remember who of you all have been my true friends — Jean and Gaspard alone.”

A sudden scuffle of feet broke the silence; the

figure of the owner of the donkey, Papillon, stood up.

"I — I, Monsieur Charles, believe you innocent!" Antoine shouted excitedly, extending a hand in an entreating gesture.

"You too then are my friend; I shall remember. If there are others, now is the time for them to declare themselves while things look black for me," I announced.

One more there was, but of that one I was not to learn until later. Perhaps there was here and there another who lacked Antoine's courage; at any rate, no second voice was lifted in my behalf in Gaspard's boat-house.

"I will proceed," said I; but the mayor raised a hand.

"You will admit, Monsieur Charles Woodworth, that there is evidence against you which Lavouche cannot but recognize."

"Recognize, yes, but Lavouche has already condemned me. It yesterday believed me guilty of attempting to sell the map, this morning believed me guilty of murder, and I can read that belief upon its face now. Lavouche has not even granted me what every man is entitled to, innocence until guilt be proven. And therefore I seek friendship of Lavouche neither now nor hereafter."

He stared at the table. "Proceed," he said finally.

"How I came into possession of the map, I have already related. On the voyage from Texas to

New York, which I previously mentioned, I became acquainted with a gentleman who has extensive interests in Central American countries and Venezuela. I gave an account of what had occurred in the West when I obtained the map, described the French mechanic of the mines, and stated how I had last encountered him running on board a vessel bound for Venezuela, the same vessel on which by chance Mr. Moore and his daughter also sailed. This gentleman instantly recognized the man by my account — and with good reason. For another person with whom he had done business, a filibuster by the name of Lonagan, had been shot against a wall in Venezuela by order of this former French mechanic; the latter had risen through schemes until he became a friend of the President of that country. The French mechanic was no other than the man who is Mr. Moore's guest and who is now an envoy. The mechanic was named D'Urville and murdered two men while at the mine at Forge; he now calls himself Señor Del Hervalles and it is not known how many murders he has since committed. I was perfectly acquainted with him at the mine, talked with him in his shop, fought against him. He hints that I am insane and possessed by an hallucination; if such is the case, then the owner of the mine, the former manager and his wife, besides others who were present on the spot, will be possessed by the same form of hallucination when they see him. That the events which occurred at Forge mine are

not an invention of a disordered mind, Mr. Moore and his daughter can affirm. They have talked with the actors who were engaged in the struggle and are familiar with the circumstances. Is such not the case, Mr. Moore?"

"I have talked with the persons you mention and know the story to be true," he replied. "There was a French mechanic. The description given of his personal appearance was similar, I regret to say, to that of Señor Del Hervalle. It is a striking likeness."

Betty sprang to her feet. "I too have had the story told to me many times by my friends. It is the truth." And she sat down with heightened color, a fighting color.

Ah, this was better than I had hoped for, Mr. Moore had gone further than I dared think. But I was a long way off from proving that D'Urville and Señor Del Hervalle were one and the same man, as was presently evident when Davis rose and stated that he had continuously served the envoy as secretary in Venezuela for four years past — and he also added a word on hallucinations and mistaken resemblances and "doubles" and so forth. Lavouche craned and stretched its ears. The investigation was exceeding its fondest hopes, it would be a wonder to relate unto the third and fourth generation.

Presently I went on. "When I came to the island, it was with no other idea than to show the map to my army friend, evade the German, and

deposit the paper with the proper American authorities. A storm began the night of my arrival, I had not yet been to Moore House. With the abatement of the gale I went thither in the evening and recognized Señor Del Hervalle as an old enemy. Then Stevens and Mr. Davis leaped on my back, thinking me a burglar, and I was dragged into the house where the Señor instantly perceived who I was. Stand up, Stevens, and tell what you know."

At my word of command, for I was resolved to push the matter on my own hook, Stevens arose.

"The Señor recognized Mr. Woodworth," said he. "He spoke his name the first time he laid eyes on him."

"And yet Señor Del Hervalle denies that he ever knew me," I stated. "Was he too laboring under an hallucination when he addressed me as Charles Woodworth if he had not met me in the Western mines? Moreover, he searched me, found the map in my pocket, at once knew it for what it was, since he had seen it often two years before at Forge, and gave it to Mr. Davis to secrete. But I tore myself from Stevens' grasp and followed him through the house and out upon the lawn, where I forced it from the secretary. Was that an hallucination when I choked you that night upon the grass, Mr. Davis?"

I waited, but he remained silent. Then once again I bade Stevens stand.

"What did the Señor say when he first beheld the map?" I questioned.

"He looked at it and exclaimed, 'Ah, the map of poor Frederic.'"

"Which was the name of the man who drew it," I explained, "Frederic Douglass, D'Urville's companion in crime at Forge, the man in whose trunk the map was found, the scoundrel with whom Señor Del Hervalle connived to steal the mine's gold." Now it was my time to feel a slim triumph, for my case so far was stronger than I thought. Del Hervalle moistened his lips, and I saw that Muriel drew away from him. "It would seem a very, very strange thing that the Señor, having never known me, having never been in America during the last five years, yet should at once know me upon this encounter, and know the map and finally pronounce the name of the very man whom I declare to have been an accomplice of the French mechanic who is identical in looks with the Señor. Have you any questions to ask, Monsieur the Mayor?" It seemed that he had not. "Shortly thereafter he called at Stag Lodge during my absence and attempted to force the map from Andrew at the point of a pistol. Andrew would not tell where it was hidden, even when he thought death should be his reward the following minute. That Señor Del Hervalle would henceforth be a dangerous enemy I guessed, how dangerous I could not tell. Presently Margot, Jean's half-sister, sent me a warning. From whom she ob-

tained her information possibly Mr. Davis can instruct you. Elizabeth Moore, kindly relate your meeting with Margot."

She arose swiftly. "I met her. She said to tell Mr. Woodworth 'Beware strange doors' and she would say no more. But only yesterday morning she sent the same warning to him, 'Beware strange doors.'"

"Let Margot speak," the mayor said.

Jean faced about. "Margot has departed from the village. Of this also perhaps Mr. Davis can speak."

The face of the secretary grew a trifle more yellow, otherwise remained unchanged. Nor did he answer.

"What was the meaning of the warning?" Surçon asked.

"That will appear," I said. "There followed the visit of the committee, the posting of the guards. At ten o'clock yesterday morning Esper informed me that Jean had been injured, was asking for me. Never thinking of a trap, I hurried to the village and came to the door of Pilon's house where Jean was supposed to lie. Then I thought of the warning, hesitated, but it was too late, for I was shoved into the room and a blanket flung over my head. I was then carried up to the empty third story where I was kept a prisoner. It seems that Andrew and Miss Moore missed me, as I was to go to the station in Antoine's cart to meet my friend, the army officer."



"That is true," Antoine roared. "With my little Papillon! Charles, you never came, though I had fed him an extra measure of grain."

Monsieur the Mayor rapped for silence.

"Each will speak only when called upon," he said.

"But it is true, Surçon!" Antoine replied stubbornly. "And I fed him an extra measure."

"Silence thou!" The owner of Papillon subsided into mutterings.

The villagers were with me, if not in sympathy, at least in interest. Half a dozen called on Antoine to hush and for me to continue.

"I was a prisoner in Pilon's house from ten in the morning until night. About seven o'clock I broke the pane of glass in a window with my head in order to shout, but the street was empty, it still being supper-time. Then Pilon and Descarte and Esper came out of the inn, and I was in fear lest they perceive the splinters of glass upon the pavement, a thing which they finally did. Presently my friend, Lieutenant Harrington, appeared coming up the street; I shouted. Pilon rushed into the house and dragged me away before the lieutenant could discover who called to him."

"Thou liest!" Pilon said fiercely.

"I speak the truth. During the afternoon Señor Del Hervalle paid me a visit in order to persuade me to give him the map. But it was not because of the map that I had been made a prisoner, no, but be-

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cause I knew he was no other than the French mechanic and he was determined that I should die. Pilon, Descarte, and Esper were to carry me out to sea that night, stab me, and cast my body into the waters. Pilon had his boat ready. When I had been dragged away from the window — see, here the glass cut my face — I gave up hope.”

I paused in my story. Excitement in the room was intense, but it was with the tension of immovability. The fisher folk scarcely breathed; only Pilon was furiously twirling his moustache and glaring at me. Del Hervalle’s eyes had narrowed to slits, though a smile rested upon his lips; old Gaspard had ceased to write, remaining with pen poised; even Jean had given over his surveillance of Esper and was gazing at me, though the tale was not new to his ears. Had I hoped to produce a dramatic effect, I could have been no more successful.

“And so it came to nine o’clock; then I escaped just as I was about to be led away to Pilon’s boat. Descarte, Esper, and Del Hervalle were in the room when I leaped up and hurled the chair on which I sat. It struck the Señor in the breast, knocking him over, and I fled down the stair and into the street.”

“How did you escape, monsieur?” the mayor demanded, leaning across the table.

“Esper was accommodating enough to cut the rope at the last minute.”

Something like a gurgle sounded in Pilon’s throat. His eyes darted murder at the little man beside him.

As for Esper he gazed at the floor, while his flickering smile came and went. Surçon bade me go on.

"Descarte and Esper pursued me. I became confused, ran among the boats, and there was cornered. Descarte attacking me, I knocked his knife from his hand, whereupon we grappled and next instant I was fighting for my life. But I had had neither food nor drink during the day, in addition to being bound for ten hours—I was weak—he got his hand on my throat and almost finished me. Then Esper killed him and saved my life."

Drawing a long breath, I leaned back in my chair. My defense was made, how good or how poor it was not for me to say; the countenances of the fishermen which had betokened varying astonishment and excitement during the recital now resumed their stolid and inscrutable look. Moved they had been, but moved to believe was another thing, though with that peculiar prescience for which we can hardly account I felt that I had shaken Pilon's story; the evidence of Betty and Stevens, slender as it was, supplementing my narrative showed them that there was more here than they had dreamt of and that Del Hervalle despite his denial was somehow mixed in the matter. But merely to shake belief is not enough; Esper would succeed me, that treacherous little scoundrel who would sell his soul for money. Even at this instant he was leering at me sardonically, like a satanic gargoyle. His affirmation of Pilon's tale would swing the scale

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once more to the other side and I would indeed be branded as a villain or a madman.

"There was no one saw you enter the village when you went to Pilon's house?" the mayor inquired.

"No, the street was empty."

"Note that fact, clerk." Old Gaspard, seeking in bewildered haste to remember as much of my story as possible and set it down, nodded his head. "You stated that you were captured by the German last night and taken aboard a yacht. There seems a discrepancy, Monsieur Woodworth."

"Not at all. Andrew and Lieutenant Harrington were searching for me; they came up the beach about ten and met me. It was after we returned to Stag Lodge that the German sprang his surprise."

A considerable pause ensued. During the interval I again perceived the singular operation of Stevens' eyelid; this time it was a distinct, unconcealed, bold wink. What did he mean? Had he not told all he knew? I studied him, watched for a further sign, but there was none. He now sat stolid, apparently indifferent.

"Monsieur, you are excused," Surçon stated.

I rose, glad that the ordeal was finished. It was then, as I stood ready to step off the platform, that my eyes strayed to the group filling the door. At first I perceived nothing different from what had been, for I was gazing against the light; directly however I noted several new heads, strange ones in

Lavouche. One man smiled at me and put a finger on his lips — a wild tumult burst forth in my heart, a sense of triumph swelled my soul. For the man who had placed a finger upon his lips, cautioning silence, was the one person who knew Del Hervalle for what he was, aye, knew the villain from the top of his bald shiny head to the tips of his patent-leather shoes.

And with my first care-free breath that day, with a singing in my heart, I stepped down and walked to my seat.

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE TALE THAT ESPER TOLD

“This is excellent jest, this murder,” Esper began and looked down his nose, smiling.

His turn upon the witness stand had arrived. Though the investigation had now been in progress three hours and it was nearly five o'clock, there was no abatement in the attention of the spectators; if anything, their interest was quickened as the end drew near. After the conclusion of my testimony there had been a pause during which time the great doors behind the platform were opened a little way to provide ventilation, chairs were shifted about, Gaspard's pen sharpened, and all once more made ready. It was to be the final act of the drama played within the boat-house; all felt that the climax had come and gathered themselves to meet it. But I—I could have laughed, for I knew what lies Esper would tell and I held in reserve still another witness.

The little fellow had mounted to the chair, smirked, laid his hat upon the board, tickled the side of his bent nose with forefinger, and began his testimony with a characteristic preface. Jean for the first time left his position by the wall; he

quietly moved to the edge of the platform, where he seated himself on the planking not three feet from the witness' elbow. Esper eyed him furtively, eyed the handle of the revolver which peeped out from the young fisherman's coat at the belt-line, while Jean for his part was seemingly engaged with other thoughts and sat as ever with arms folded, gazing straight before him.

"A most excellent jest," Esper repeated.

Surçon rapped smartly on the table. "There is no jest in it whatever," he said.

"Pardon, Monsieur the Mayor," Esper replied, twisting his head about, "is it not a jest that —"

"Begin, begin! And at the beginning."

"*Nom de chien!* if one begins, how else could it be but at a beginning? I have the honor to inform every one that I was born in a stable in the town of Luneville, Department of Meurthe-et-Moselle, in France. I am thirty-eight years of age, have followed the professions of street-vender, paper-seller, musician, juggler, chef, fisherman, *valet-de-chambre*, writer, grave-digger, and barber; I have lived in Lyons, Chalons, Orleans, Rochelle, Marseilles, Bordeaux, Cologne, Paris, Geneva, Venice, Genoa, Tunis, Lisbon, St. Johns, Quebec, and Lavouche; my nose was broken by a soldier who disputed with me over a woman; I can fence, speak five languages, dance beautifully, weave baskets, and compose amorous verses; I have been thrice seriously ill — once with typhus, once with cholera, once with

jaundice, besides which I am troubled with baldness and have been kissed by St. Vitus on the lips; I am — ”

“ Stop! ” Surçon thundered.

“ Yes, Monsieur the Mayor.”

“ We care not what you are or what you can do; get on with your evidence.”

“ In good time, monsieur; permit me also to state that I am familiar with judicial procedure. I have been eight times arrested, but each time through mistake; seventeen times a witness; and forty-three times present at trials where I had an interest — these in many cities and in various *procès d'examination*.”

He perked over his shoulder like a clown, his long horse-face turned to Surçon, his smile flickering like candle-light.

“ Begin with Lavouche,” the mayor ordered.

“ As is agreeable to you. I came to Lavouche with Descarte, who was a drunkard, and with Pilon, who is also a drunkard and whom I made the acquaintance of in Marseilles one time when he had just been released from the galleys — ”

“ Galleys, thou rat! ” Pilon shouted, starting to his feet, “ I have not yet worn the iron — I will strangle thee! ”

“ Silence — silence! ” the mayor cried, and Pilon fell back fuming.

“ It is true, thou hast the love-marks of the little rings on thy ankles even to this day,” Esper con-



tinued. "We came to Lavouche to fish. Said Pilon, 'There are those simpletons down yonder; we will find a way to empty their pockets.' That appeared an excellent jest, so we came. I, Esper, was disappointed to find this spot but a little village; to one who had lived in cities it was insignificant, hopeless, though I congratulate madame upon the fact that she keeps excellent wine. One day we became acquainted with Señor Del Hervalle, and Pilon conducted certain business matters with that gentleman. It seems that they concerned Monsieur Woodworth, but what will you, men must live! Monsieur was to be pickled like a mackerel, though in the sea instead of in a cask. I it was who informed him, in accordance with the trap which had been set, that Jean lay hurt. That too was amusing."

"Thou villain!" Pilon sprang forward.

Esper leaped to his feet, whipped forth a knife.

"Villain thou! Have I borne thy kicks and cuffs and flung wine-cups, swine, for nothing! Ha, you have taken money and not divided, kept monsieur's watch and not divided — come thou here and let me slit your gullet a little way. Esper is a rat, Esper is a marionette, Esper is an old boot to kick about! I have waited, thou dog and son of a dog! Come, I will pick your teeth with my knife point, I will tickle your fat belly. Name of God, I will slice you into ribbons and little squares!" And hissing curses, Esper stood knife in hand, an image of hate and rage.

Next minute Pilon had been thrust back into his seat by those nearest him; Esper's knife had vanished, his transport of fury with it, and he sat again the same inimitable little fellow he had been before his outburst, smiling down his nose. To see him, it was to believe that nothing had happened. Presently he was commanded to proceed with his evidence.

"Monsieur Woodworth with the blanket over his head looked very much like an Algerian duenna. It was entertaining; also his vexation when he was tied in the chair in the loft was amusing — it would make me blush, Monsieur the Mayor, to repeat some of the remarks which passed monsieur's lips. I am sensitive of coarse speech, yes, having acted in the capacity of *valet-de-chambre* and being used to agreeable society. True, as madame stated, we drank much of the day and much of her brandy in the inn. In the evening Monsieur Woodworth and I engaged in private discussion, speculating on what it would be like to dwell under the sea where there is so much salt, likewise debating a little business transaction. *Mon Dieu*, monsieur has wit and the talk was excellent between us; monsieur is also a business gentleman and we arrived at a satisfactory agreement whereby he was to pay me five hundred dollars for cutting the rope. Monsieur is nimble; it was astonishing even to me who have seen many extraordinary things to perceive the rapidity with which he gave his compliments in the form of a

chair to Señor Del Hervalle. Señor was quite prostrated by them."

I glanced at Del Hervalle, a pallor had crept into his face, but the complacent look still lingered; what his feelings were, now that his tool was betraying him, I could only imagine. His self-control was magnificent. The villagers were whispering together, casting open looks at him, for their belief in Pilon's lie had fled before this square repudiation by Esper. And the most excellent jest of all was the manner in which little Esper, with a heart full of hate for his comrade, leading him into the trap while deceiving me at the same time in the thought that he would commit perjury, had bided his moment.

"That brute of a Descarte and I followed monsieur down the street into the boats," he continued. "There they fought. I watched the struggle. Then presently I pricked Descarte in the back, and Descarte ceased to be further interested or interesting. After that monsieur and I planned a little, for there was still Pilon and the Señor to deal with. Señor was an orange which had not yet been squeezed, except by Pilon, — therefore a little squeezing by Esper was very proper, was it not, Monsieur the Mayor? Yet Señor Del Hervalle is a dry orange; only a few drops came forth between my fingers and thumb when he asked me to swear to Pilon's lie, only three hundred dollars, Monsieur the Mayor. *Nom de Dieu*, that part of the jest was

disappointing," said he, wrinkling his brow in regret.

Where he sat, excitable Antoine, owner of the donkey, stood up and shook a fist.

"Thou Pilon — wretch, liar! Had I but my fingers on thy throat! To seek to lie Monsieur Charles' life away!"

Confusion arose, people sprang to their feet in excitement. With a curse Pilon leaped up, while watchful Jean ran forward, thrusting his revolver into his face.

"Sit," he commanded.

Sulkily Pilon obeyed, and the mayor began to pound on his table and call for order. This was slow to come, voices spoke throughout the room in agitated talk; no longer was I believed guilty, no longer a murderer. Looking over my shoulder, I observed that the strangers who had listened in the rear had pressed forward until now they stood in the aisle. There were four of them, two whom I knew, two whom I did not.

"Order!" Surçon roared. "Esper, you are excused."

The witness stepped down, glanced at Pilon, who in turn glared at him, opening and shutting his hands, then deposited his small body on the edge of the platform and against the wall across the room from his former companion and leader.

"Monsieur the Mayor, I would speak," said the inn-woman. She turned to her tousle-headed boy.

“Stand thou up on thy chair and repeat what thou heard while serving wine to Pilon and Descarte and Esper, or I shall rap thy ears soundly.”

The boy, possibly ten years old, began to weep with fear at prospect of this undesired prominence, but climbed up as he was bidden. In a timid voice he began his account, aided by suggestions from the inn-woman; gradually interest in what he was saying restored his confidence, he wiped the tears from his cheeks, licked the corners of his mouth, and concluded this part of the evidence. He had served Pilon, Descarte, and Esper with wine and brandy during yesterday, going to and fro between the barrels and their tables; it was while engaged in this trudging service, an apron tied about his neck and while he placed their glasses or wiped the board with a cloth or stood behind them awaiting fresh orders, that he caught scraps of their conversation. As he told his disconnected tale, he pointed a stubby dirty finger now at Pilon, now at Esper, now at me. It was in the loft of a house that I was tied; Pilon had made his boat ready, but Descarte growled in his winecup because his feet were sore; they had also disputed about a timepiece which they had, which they even brought forth and displayed while they quarreled; they were in the inn most of the day and they were going to take me out of the house at night and out upon the water. Scraps only he heard, in scraps he told their talk, in short jerky sentences, with much time for thought be-

tween, with many promptings, with innumerable details of himself and of the cups and the table and the barrels and the wine.

"Last night he told it all to me," madame affirmed. "And I saw Monsieur Charles go by the window with Esper at ten o'clock yesterday morning, saw them though I was bent over the stocking which I knitted and though it was foggy. But I see many things of which I do not speak until the proper time."

Here was another friend and more proof that my tale was true. By every one madame was known for her knitting and her quiet tongue, which when it did vent speech uttered words for a purpose; so there was no doubt any longer in the minds of the fishermen that I was the innocent victim of a plot.

"Pilon," the mayor started to say.

By rising to his feet Stevens however caused him to pause.

"With Mr. Moore's consent I will give some information."

"Speak," Mr. Moore said.

"It's this. I was aware that Señor Del Hervalle had recognized Mr. Woodworth on their first meeting. I suspected at the time that there was something underneath the surface, but of course could do nothing more to find out. First, Miss Betty, who also suspected something, asked me to keep my eyes open; then Mr. Woodworth told me this morning to keep the Señor under surveillance as much as

possible. At a little before one o'clock the Señor walked alone up and down on the lawn before Moore House, after which he suddenly entered the wood and moved rapidly towards Stag Lodge." When Stevens made this statement I straightened, my heart beating with exultation. I glanced at Del Hervalles, who had given a start. The fox was trapped at last. "Keeping behind him and following under cover of bushes, I too went in that direction, not letting him out of my sight. Presently he halted in sight of the open space before the Lodge. Then he began to retreat carefully, while I did the same, keeping a gap between us. Mr. Woodworth and Andrew were in sight, walking slowly up the path in the wood and conversing. The Señor watched them a moment; suddenly he stepped into the open, fired a revolver, then turned and ran, glancing over his shoulder towards the place where the other pair halted. It was only by flinging myself down upon the ground that I escaped being seen. Whether any one was hit by the bullet, I did not at the time learn, as I felt it my duty to follow after the Señor and see whether or not he returned to Moore House. This he did. Since the beginning of the investigation it comes out that Andrew was shot. Señor Del Hervalles did it, and I accuse him of holding the pistol and pulling the trigger."

An uproar broke forth in the room. Antoine shouted to hang Pilon, to hang Del Hervalles, to hang Esper, to hang all the villains in Lavouche.

Men crowded forward, turning to each other as they advanced, questioning what to do, whether or not to act; women chattered in terrified anxious voices; children whimpered. Chairs scraped, shavings rustled, voices rang noisily throughout the shop.

“Order!” Surgeon bawled.

He seized Gaspard’s ink-pot and beat the table violently, splashing ink everywhere. “Order — silence! Be seated! Let the Señor speak!”

Ah yes, let the Señor say what he had to say; the words were caught up and repeated from person to person. That would be worth hearing, that; and hushing one another the people stiffened in expectant silence. Yes, indeed, now was the time for Del Hervalle, who had laid plots, woven schemes, spoken of hallucinations, to come forth and explain this thing which Stevens had declared. I leaned back in my seat — the hour had struck for Del Hervalle.

He arose quietly and looked about.

“Many lies have been told to-day,” he said, “greatest of all, this last one. I am here, an envoy from another nation, on important business with your government. I do not even answer it, I ignore the charge of assassination — it is absurd, malicious, impossible. The tale that Charles Woodworth relates is the fabrication of a disordered mind, he should be examined by medical experts for lunacy. I deny all that has been pronounced of me; this I do, though it is not necessary to make any statement, since I am a foreign official and responsible



only to my own government for my conduct. Your own country will and must respect my person. Absurd all this story, when I have never been in America before, when I am uninterested in what you do, know no one — ”

A voice broke in upon his statement, a figure strode up the aisle and confronted him.

“ You know me, D’Urville.” It was Jack Maitland who spoke, Jack, whom I had urged by letter and telegram to come to my assistance and who, with three companions, had arrived in the midst of the investigation. “ You know me, monsieur, though I’ve not seen you since two years ago when you helped Douglass steal gold from Forge and sought to murder me there.”

Del Hervalle shrank away from him until he brushed Pilon’s body. Rapidly he shot a look over the room; everywhere were inimical faces, everywhere hostile eyes. By a wonderful effort he recovered his composure, spoke a few low rapid words to Pilon. I glanced at his secretary, Davis; the man’s skin was sickly, his eyes were closed, and more than ever his face seemed carved out of ivory; his breath came with difficulty, as if it caught and hung for an instant somewhere about his heart.

“ I am Señor Del Hervalle,” said the envoy smoothly.

“ Señor Del Hervalle you may call yourself,” Maitland retorted, “ but D’Urville you are nevertheless, the same D’Urville who blackened Forge

with crimes and together with Frederic Douglass strove to take my life. Now you are seeking Woodworth's because he recognizes you for what you are and is a menace to your safety. But it won't do, D'Urville, it won't do. For here also is Mr. Fenton, whom you will remember. Ah, you're masquerading now in a long coat instead of a smudged mechanic's jacket; you are very adroit, very plausible, and one of the most dangerous criminals that walk the earth."

Mr. Fenton, the iron-jawed, large-boned New York financier, advanced to Maitland's side. He tugged at his gray moustache, scrutinizing the little Frenchman. "It is he, no mistake about that. I'm glad to see you again, monsieur, though the pleasure was one I never expected to experience. But now I shall see that you hang by the neck; I've come in a special train all the distance from New York in your honor."

By now the villagers crowded close in a semicircle about the actors. The new and final turn which the presence of the New Yorkers gave keyed them to the last notch of expectancy and excitement.

"It is a very fine jest indeed, is it not, Monsieur the Mayor?" spoke Esper, from the witness chair upon which he had leaped to have a better view and where now he stood an impudent observer.

Surçon rolled an eye at him, but being too profoundly astonished at the whole affair to make admonition remained silent.

"I am the envoy of Venezuela," said Señor Del Hervalles in the same smooth voice he had previously commanded, "and consequently immune from interference on your part. Mr. Moore will so inform you. I refer you to your government and —"

"That won't serve, D'Urville," Mr. Fenton answered dryly. "I burned the wires all day yesterday between New York and Washington in order to put the government in possession of the facts pertaining to you, and these two gentlemen" — he indicated the men who stood a little way behind him — "are here with authority to act. One is from the State Department, the other is a secret service officer. Venezuela, I fear, will lose an envoy."

"Ha, Pilon, how tastes this soup?" Esper inquired gayly.

"Order!" Surçon said mechanically, "order and silence!"

"Very well, Monsieur Fenton. Will you be so accommodating as to hand me my hat?" Señor Del Hervalles requested. "Then we will proceed."

When the covering was given to him, he bowed low politely. When he straightened up, an empty chair rose in his hand and flew straight at the ring of people before him. So silent, so sudden, so wholly astounding was the attack that Maitland, the secret service officer, Fenton, all of us fell back, flinging up shielding arms.

With a light bound Del Hervalles sprang upon the platform, Pilon with him; two steps carried

them across it and off at the opposite side, leaving the planks vibrating and pounding on the boats which formed their base. A shot from Jean's pistol sped after their forms, but harmlessly, since he had no time to aim. One more forward leap and the two men vanished between the wide rear doors which stood partially open for air. Then these were slammed shut with a jarring bang.

A score of us piled pell-mell after the fleeing men, knocking over chairs and table and scattering paper and ink-pot in our wild rush. Surçon stupefied, old Gaspard dazed and still clutching his quill ready to write, Esper standing on the witness chair — all were swept forward in our advance to seize Del Hervalle and Pilon. We flung ourselves against the doors — they shook but did not yield; again we hurled our bodies upon the broad leaves to no better purpose.

"They're propped shut with a beam," Gaspard squealed shrilly. "Pilon has propped them with a beam."

Hands tore out planks from the platform, swung them with muttered curses against the door, in the manner of a battering ram. But the doors were stout, the prop well placed, we could not force them. For a time we stood dismayed.

"Out of the other end!" I shouted at last. "They have a boat at the north point of the isle. To the boat, men! Quick!"

As one person we turned, springing over boats

and lumber. Women and children shrank together in confusion, shrieking; the room rang with noise, with the thumping of overturned chairs, chairs hurled aside, with pounding feet, shouts, the pushing of crowded bodies. A dog broke into a frenzied yelp somewhere under foot and added to the hubbub. Suddenly the congestion opened free before me and I almost pitched forward on my head. Pistol in hand, I rushed to the south door.

## CHAPTER XXII

### LAST OF THE TALE

Out of the boat-shop we streamed, men, women, children, dogs.

Fog filled the air. The walls of the village loomed vaguely at our backs and vanished farther up the street. Thank Heaven, it was not necessary to depend upon sight; Stevens' bit of spying had made that unnecessary. Del Hervalle and Pilon would trust their secret to save them; careful schemer that he was, the former had prepared the boat for a last contingency, a final resort.

Racing northward, I crossed down to the beach and ran upon the smooth hard sand. The tide was in, *The Throat* was full, the waves flowed and uncurled in sudsy foam. Rage at being thus thwarted by the Frenchman lent me speed, and gradually I perceived that the others were falling behind, all save Jean, who had caught me up and was running by my side, his splendid body swinging forward at each step as regularly as a perfect machine. A hundred yards were past. Out somewhere upon the shrouded sea we could hear the low bleat of a fog-horn, the warning cry of some coasting steamer moving fearfully upon its way. The fine moisture

of the fog sifted against our faces, the sands gave no sound save a soft crunch to our flying feet, and from under the cover of the mist the ocean's waves emerged to meet us, but broke and slithered over the beach in glassy lines.

I gripped my revolver. Del Hervallo to escape now! Never, even if I should have to wade into the sea after him! Heaven would not play such a dastardly trick, would not turn loose once again upon the earth such a monster! With Andrew lying in Stag Lodge, white and near death, lying on the same island with the assassin who had fired the shot, Heaven could not be so unjust!

The line of the beach began to curve gradually eastward, while growing narrower; the sea encroached upon it and forced us nearer the brown rugged cliffs of rock which rose above the ocean at this part of the island. Their fronts stood sheer, slashed now and again by crevices and ravines that led up to the wood above; fragments and blocks detached and fallen down upon the sands impeded us, among which we dodged with unslackened speed. Gulls flew up screaming, vanishing in the mist that blew and rolled in clouds across sea and earth.

"Are you sure of them here, Charles?" Jean asked.

"Stevens followed Del Hervallo. The boat was at the north point."

Once I slipped on a stone that protruded from the sand like a fang, but was up again instantly with

scarcely a second lost. As we ran, all of the events in which I had played a part raced through my mind in pictures and scenes, as if they had been cast in some kaleidoscopic fashion upon the fog: the tragedy at Forge; my months upon the ranch under the hot sun of Texas; the day upon the steamer when the coffee merchant, the journalist, Harrington, and I had discussed this same villain; my coming to the island and my encounter with Von Hussman; my capture at Moore House; Del Herval's visit at the Lodge; the committee of fishermen; Esper and I bantering under the tree; the struggle in the room and my imprisonment in the loft of Pilon's house; Descarte's death on the sands among the boats; my sojourn on board the yacht, with the German inspecting the map; the talks with Betty; the shot in the wood; the trial in the boat-house. They flew through my brain in tatters and rags. Was it years, or only days, in which time had poured out these things that had happened here at Lavouche!

On a sudden Jean held up a hand, stopping as did I.

"Their voices," said he, "and this is the north point."

The shingle of sand just here was open and free from any fallen blocks, spreading smooth and white from the foot of the cliff to the water. Hand yet lifted, Jean leaned forward to hearken; it seemed at first as if we were alone with the sea; across the



water stole the muffled bass mooing of the fog horn, like the voice of some dejected sea-animal; the water lapped and gurgled and slithered and slid at our feet, while from the coast of the mainland higher up sounded the rolling beat of surf; all about us in whirling clouds, in thin vapors, or driving mists, the fog swept southward upon the light breeze.

Then some distance off there sounded a voice, Pilon's, speaking.

Jean whispered, "Keep against the rock so that we shall not be seen."

Creeping along its brown flank, pistols in hand, we advanced in the direction of the speaker. Gradually a darker blot appeared in the gray fog — the boat which had been moored at low tide by a rope to a tooth of rock and which now floated upon the risen waters. Nearer we crept. We could make out its lines, its hull, its ghostly mast. It rocked and pitched upon the incoming swells like a live thing, now riding high, now sinking into a trough, while its cable slapped the waves at each conclusive jerk of its body. Pilon was at work. Yet nearer we crept, so near we could distinguish the details of his person — his head and back, his trousers rolled to the knee and the unsubmerged part of his bare legs. He had waded forth into the water in order to draw the craft nearer shore.

Señor Del Hervalle stood closer to us, a portfolio under his arm which he had evidently left on dry land when he stored his other property aboard.

Behind him a ravine full of bushes opened, and down this I knew led the path from Moore House and the wood to this spot. The man stood about the middle of the sand, looking shorter and fatter than ever through the illusive mist.

"Hasten, my good Pilon," he said, "we know not when they may come."

"None know of us here," the other returned confidently, "except Davis — and what of him, Señor?"

Del Hervalle turned and gazed in our direction, reflecting. Jean and I melted into the stone against which we crouched. Did he perceive us? With a pounding heart I awaited discovery. But he was a full fifty feet off; we blended with the cliff and his vision ranged beyond. Removing his silk hat, he wiped his brow, remaining bare of head for a few seconds to allow the cooling air to play over his crown.

"Davis must take his own chance," he said. "We shall not wait."

"Good," grunted Pilon. "I never liked that Davis."

The sail was now hauled up; the speaker stood looking at it, then he stepped upon the prow, jumped out into the knee-deep water and began dragging the small vessel in towards the beach.

"Loose the rope, Señor, all is ready," he stated.

Del Hervalle deposited at his feet the portfolio which he carried, turned, and made his way to the

fragment of stone which had been utilized as a mooring-post, where he began to unwrap the coils.

"Now is the time," I whispered, leaning forward to spring.

Jean's hand closed on my arm.

"No, Pilon must come nearer."

Breathlessly I waited. Each second seemed an age, an age of terrible suspense. Slowly, indolently, Pilon drew the boat towards the beach, wading through the water with swishing steps. Del Hervalles, who was coiling the rope and moving to meet him as he worked, suddenly paused. A faint shout had sounded down the beach behind us; the villagers were coming.

"Faster, Pilon," he cried, "I hear voices."

Pilon in turn halted, cupping a hand to his ear. "There are none, Señor, you heard but a gull scream."

"No, no, they come." And he began to wrap the rope hurriedly.

"Very well, Señor."

Jean gripped my forearm. I felt his fingers quiver. As for myself my pulses were galloping; for the moment had come.

"Now!" Jean breathed.

Up we leaped, running. I had trusted that we should be upon them before they were aware of our presence, but this was to hope too much; Pilon, who saw us, uttered a shout of warning. Del Hervalles whirled about, dropped the rope, while his

hand darted into his breast and he uttered an oath. A revolver was whipped out by him, and with the same movement it was fired. The report cracked sharply against the cliff; the bullet sung by our heads.

I have never been a particularly expert shot, indeed, my targets have shown but few bull's-eyes. Now however my nerves were steeled by determination. Aiming at the widest part of his body, I fired, and without waiting fired again. A sort of cough came from his lips and his weapon dropped from his fingers, while he staggered and fell.

"To me, Pilon, to me!" he cried, stretching forth a hand, "let me not be taken!"

Pilon however was too greatly engaged to render assistance, for Jean, swerving when he saw that Del Hervalle was down, ran towards the sailor. The latter crouched behind the prow of his boat which grated on the sand, and they began firing wildly at each other. With a sudden curse Pilon flung his pistol at Jean's head, gave the boat a mighty shove, and flung himself into it.

"To me, Pilon," Del Hervalle uttered in a last despairing cry.

I drew nearer to the man slowly, watchfully. He lay sprawling on his breast with coat-tails outspread and looked like some misshapen beast or huge toad or great black round beetle. He was in pain, apparent from the convulsive working of his hands, opening and clutching at the sand. My shots, as I

afterwards learned, had not been especially fine, were they judged by the standards of pistol fire, but they had been singularly effective — one through the bowels and one through the hip — and he could not in any case have lived long. His little eyes were fixed upon me with malignant hatred, as would have been those of a wounded, helpless spider; his face was ashen, which brought out with sinister distinctness the line of his black, close-trimmed, pointed beard and waxed moustaches.

"Thus ends the dream of empire, monsieur," I said, looking down upon him.

"Water!" he gasped.

"That brine?" I asked, pointing at the sea.

"What other? be quick!"

He was in agony. I thrust my revolver into my pocket and hurried to the marge.

Jean and Pilon were fighting a battle of their own. Since the latter had flung away his weapon, Jean had put away his pistol also, trusting to bare hands. The man in the boat caught up an oar to strike my companion, but Jean seized the blade of it and thus they tugged. Pilon's face was one of fury, a baffled animal's, with curses pouring from his mouth; that of Jean's was cold, gray, expressionless, as if cast in iron, and he had one hand on the gunwale, was wading beside the boat, was waiting an opportunity to spring in and close with his antagonist.

Shouts came from the beach. Through the fog I

could see forms running towards us. I scooped up a double handful of water and turned towards Del Hervalle. It was only to drop it with a cry, to run towards him. For while my back was turned he had wriggled forwards — what the effort cost him must have been something dreadful — and was stretching a hand to the revolver which he had dropped. A spring, a kick, and I sent it spinning far away.

“Mischief will not cease in you until you are dead,” I exclaimed harshly. “You think yet to sting with your last breath.”

A wan smile hovered on his lips, a semblance of the old bland smile I knew so well. He struggled over upon his back, where he seemed to rest easier.

“I think it is myself I shall have to sting, *mon Charles*,” he answered.

Men were running towards us, behind them were others, and behind these still more, for cries could be heard all down the beach, cries of alarm at the shots which had echoed from the cliff. The runners nearest were calling out, pointing at me.

“*Bon Dieu*, must I make a spectacle of dying for the *canaille*?” Del Hervalle gasped.

“You have earned it.”

“They may look at my body, not my soul,” he said between set teeth; “you only shall have that honor.”

Flipping his hand into his bosom, he plucked out a stiletto, small, bright, slender. Involuntarily a cry of horror escaped me.

"This you shall not deprive me of at least," he said, smiling once more.

The needle point rested upon his bosom. His fingers tightened around the handle.

"Not that!" I exclaimed.

And I have often since wondered why I should so cry out. Why indeed not thus? Was it not fitting? If he were a villain, he had at any rate been bold in his villainy.

He lay upon his back. His face smiled up at me with colorless lips.

"Thus ends the dream of empire — with a needle-prick," said he in a musing voice.

Then, before my horrified eyes, the stiletto sank until the handle alone was visible. The smile froze upon his lips, his eyes opened a trifle; his fingers slipped from the hilt and rested lightly upon his bosom. And there was only the booming of the surf, like a requiem.

Del Hervalle — D'Urville — the man of crimes, iniquities, contrivances, schemes, plots, evil deeds, was dead!

A hand touched my elbow. I looked round. Surgeon was at my shoulder, beside him other men, all staring upon the black form upon the sands. No word of explanation was needed to make clear what occurred; they asked no questions.

A shout of exultation from the water aroused us; we turned thither, to behold Pilon triumphant. He had wrenched the oar free, beaten Jean off. Out

and eastward the little craft had been blown by the wind; its bow swung away from the island; but Jean still followed, intent, undaunted, relentless. Now the water washed about his waist, he waded deeper, Pilon struck at him, cursed him, mocked him, laughed aloud.

Suddenly Jean brought forth his hand and shook water from the weapon it held. Fascinated by the drama being played before our eyes and seen through the mist indistinctly, we followed along the beach. Now Pilon uttered a cry, he dropped his oar; but it was too late to crouch under cover of the gunwale, for Jean fired. A scream burst from the sailor's lips that rang among the cliffs, a scream of anguish; and his body pitched forward and sank beneath the water. Jean turned about. Without another look he waded shoreward, came dripping out of the sea, his work done.

Slowly we returned to the spot where the body of Del Hervalley lay. Each moment new arrivals augmented our number, until finally the whole village, men, women, and children, stood in a circle peering at it in silence. Even Mr. Moore, Mr. Fenton, and the gentleman from the State Department had caught the contagion, following the pursuit. A warm hand crept into mine — Betty's. Tears of happiness shone in her eyes, for I was alive, free, and unharmed.

The approach of night, hastened by the fog, was darkening earth.



"Am I to consider myself still under investigation, Monsieur the Mayor?" I asked.

"There is no need," Surçon replied. "The guilt of Señor Del Hervalle and Pilon was established beyond all doubt and they have paid the penalty. Esper alone remains."

"I promised him immunity," said I. "He helped me to escape and further testified in my behalf. Where is the rascal?"

"Here, master."

He stood a little way on my right, holding my hat before him with both hands. He gazed at Del Hervalle thoughtfully.

"Thus you might have ended," said I, pointing.

"But I did not, master."

"Give me my hat."

"It is well that I fetched it, or you would have caught cold in the head—and it is Pilon, after all, who is pickled," he added.

"Get away with you," said I, weary of his nonsense.

"Yes, master."

Under the directions of Surçon certain fishermen took up the body of Del Hervalle to carry it to the village; so with all Lavouche as a *cortége* it was borne down the beach. Mr. Fenton, Maitland, and the two gentlemen with them, Mr. Moore and those of his household clustered about me in turn pressing my hand. Then I beheld the mayor lingering, uneasy and downcast.

"What is it, Monsieur the Mayor?" I asked.

"Ah, it is not as Monsieur the Mayor that I would have you address me, only as Surçon. You have said that you would have no friends but Jean and Gaspard —" He halted, unable to proceed.

"Come, is that all?" said I, stretching forth my hand.

He seized it, radiant. "We are as children here in Lavouche, we are simple," he exclaimed, "simple, as Pilon said, but honest. We do not know the great world outside and the evil men may do, such as Señor Del Hervalle sought to work against you."

"Let us forget all that has happened."

"No, we will keep it for a shame to us. But we shall love you more than ever, indeed, we have always loved you in our hearts. It was only our minds that were deceived."

"Lavouche shall always be dear to me," I answered, and he went away happy.

Our party walked down the eastern shore of the island, since Mr. Moore had invited the new-comers to spend the night at his house. I begged to be permitted to precede them, as I was anxious to reach Stag Lodge and learn of Andrew's condition. Thereupon Mr. Fenton informed me that he had picked up the surgeon for whom I had wired, taking him at the solicitation of the division superintendent aboard his own train, which he was glad to do when he learned that it was at my urgent demand the physician was coming to the island.

"And he has been attending your servant these two hours past," he concluded.

"I must go to Andrew at once notwithstanding," I answered. "He saved my life, and my heart is heavy for him."

"Go, by all means," Mr. Moore said. "You can return to Moore House later, as Mr. Fenton says that the surgeon brought with him a trained nurse. You must eat, as well as the rest of us; all of you shall be fed at my table."

"Very well," said I, and hurried forward.

Then Betty flew to my side. "I'll go with you, for I also love Andrew."

It was not until we were out of sight of the others, past Moore wharf and come almost to Stag Lodge, that I clasped Betty in my arms. So much had been gone through, so much suffered, so many dangers escaped, that love and happiness welled in my breast. Her dear eyes looked into mine with trust and joy; her arms clung to me. Nothing should ever divide us, the sweetest, truest, most loyal heart in the world and mine.

"The ocean is wide, but not as wide as our love," said I. "It beats and throbs and flows forever, yet not so greatly as our love; it has tides, but our hearts will have none; there are fogs and storms and night—our love will not know them. It plumbs the waters, it runs to meet the dawn, it ascends and it sits in heaven. My soul gives itself to you, dearest."

Awhile after, as we went, I perceived Esper following afar off. Had he seen? He walked with a finger laid upon his nose. Well, I cared not — all the world might know my love for this dear girl at my side whose hand clasped mine.

In Stag Lodge I found the surgeon and Billy sitting before the fireplace, the one grave and the other glum. But at my appearance the latter sprang up, ran to me and wrung my hand.

"All is well, all is well?" he demanded.

"All's well with me," I responded. "The investigation is over, I'm proven innocent, Pilon and Del Hervalle were shown to be guilty and now they're dead."

"Dead!" His eyes opened wide.

"Yes, Jean killed the one and Del Hervalle died by his own hand."

"Of course I had to miss the fun," he sighed.

"But you've done me a nobler service here than you could have performed there. Your part was true friendship."

"You know of course I would not have wished to do anything else than I did."

"And Andrew?"

"Doing finely. The bullet is out and he is sleeping. The old fellow has a constitution like an ox — simple life, early hours, and all that, you know."

Now indeed was I happy. To know that he would recover, be my old faithful Andrew again, caused my cup of joy to run over. I would have a peep

at him! So tiptoeing into the bedroom, Betty with me, I beheld him fast asleep. His silver hair had been smoothed, his eyes were closed, he breathed softly and regularly. The nurse smiled, raised a finger, and we went out as noiselessly as we had entered. Dear old Andrew!

"I am Monsieur Woodworth's new *valet-de-chambre*," I heard a familiar voice remark.

Esper stood before the fireplace, very much at home.

"By Heaven, you need a bath then," the surgeon stated, with a puff at his pipe.

"That is very true. Circumstances of late have caused me to suffer inconveniences, Monsieur the Doctor, among them a lack of washing—I will presently shine with soap and water."

Suddenly a thought struck me.

"What became of Davis?" I asked him.

"*Nom de chien*, he vanished into the sands when every one ran after you; he hastened to a boat, pushed off, and rowed across to the mainland. I, who had stopped to secure your hat, caught him by the elbow. 'Monsieur, it is impolite to go without making a farewell,' I said. But he was in anxiety it appeared. 'Damn you, out of the way!' he answered. So I sent a little stone after him to give him more haste, which struck him on the leg and accomplished its purpose, master."

I turned to Betty.

"This Esper is to be my valet," I said, smiling.

"I purchased my escape from Pilon's house on that condition."

"This fellow!"

Esper bowed.

"I am a very good valet, mademoiselle, — also I am very discreet."

Now did he refer to what he had seen on the beach, I wondered?

"This poor Andrew," he went on, "I will cure him. I have been something of a doctor, among other things. I am acquainted with herbs, poultices, and cupping." At which the surgeon sniffed.

"Come, we shall all go to Moore House for supper," said I.

The surgeon knocked the coal out of his pipe and rose, while Billy secured their hats. As we passed from the house to the beach, I looked back at its lamp-lit windows, a hundred emotions rising in my breast.

A shadow spoke at my elbow.

"A most excellent jest is finished, master."

And so it was — a jest of Fate, an entanglement that had taken three men from earth in the jesting.

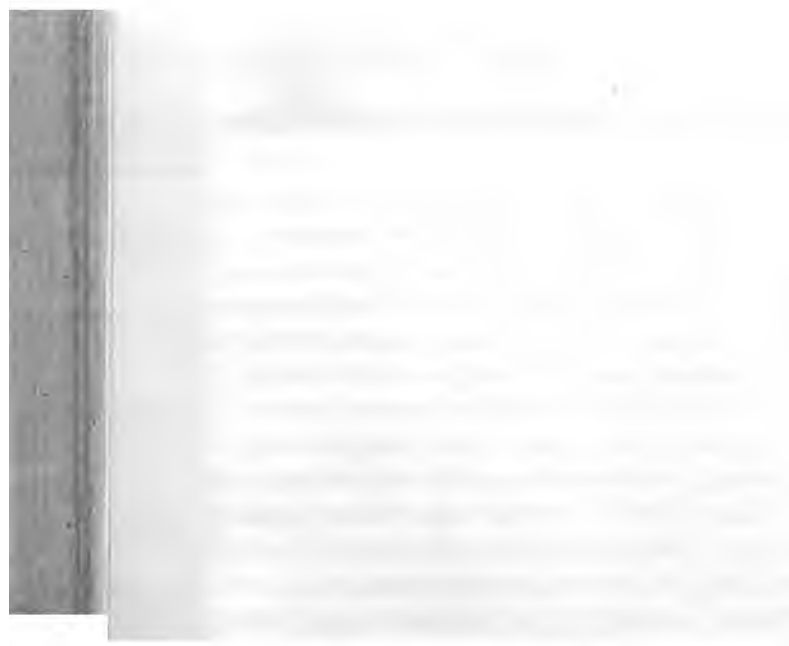
THE END

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